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THE

MISTRESS OF LYDGATE

BY

EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN,

Author of "The Head of the House," "Barbara's Brothers," "Her Husband's Home," "Two Enthusiasts," "Joint Guardians."

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me."—XXIII. PSALM.

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THE

MISTRESS OF LYDGATE.

INTRODUCTION.

WHEN I was a young girl I used so often to hear my grandmother spoken of as 'a wonderful woman,' that the phrase became distasteful to me, and I felt an odd kind of prejudice against the old lady, whom I had not seen since I was a child.

I was too young in those days to have any sympathy with age. People over thirty seemed of necessity too old to be in any way interesting. As for wishing to hear the story of my grandmother's life, such an idea never entered into my head.

If I had paused to think about it, I might have known that she had had a great deal of trouble. I knew that my grandfather had died when my father was but a lad, and that there were brothers

and sisters of his, who were to me but names upon the tablet in the church.

But, as I have before hinted, young girls seldom realize that the death of aunts and uncles, years ago, meant also the death of well-loved sons and daughters to somebody; and that each of those names and dates upon the marble tablet implied a whole history of mingled joy and grief to the mother who had watched the children grow, and had seen their lives cut short.

I at least never realized all that. I lived a happy, careless, shielded life, and I was not at all interested in the wonderful grandmother often named by my parents, nor was I sorry that the brief visits paid by her to the Mount were generally timed, as it chanced, during the warm summer-tide, when I was paying a round of visits to friends and relatives. As I was the eldest daughter at home, and the only one 'out,' I had to take my share in the entertaining of guests, and I was convinced that my grandmother would be a tiresome, exacting, critical old lady, and was not sorry that I could escape her visits without any visible effort on my part to do so.

But I soon had cause to change my estimate of my aged relative.

One spring I had a very bad illness which confined me for many weary weeks to my bed, and left me as weak and helpless as a child. Change of

air and scene, and even of the faces round me, was prescribed. I went first to an aunt's house where I generally felt very much at home and very happy; but I suppose it must have been the weak state I was in that made the change, for I was perfectly miserable, cried all day long for my mother, and wrote imploring letters to her begging her to take me home.

She came and took me away—but not home. She told me that I must have change, and that she was going to send me to my grandmother at Lydgate, and counselled me firmly and kindly to try and be brave, and not give way to depression and home-sickness.

I implored and entreated in vain to go home. My mother listened kindly, but her purpose was unshaken. Two days later, upon a lovely evening of early summer, I found myself driving alone in my grandmother's open carriage, along a very lovely road, through most exquisite scenery, to the old, gray, ecclesiastical-looking house, half-way up a wooded hill, and most picturesque both in its surroundings and in its every detail. This house was Lydgate, and my grandmother's home, where she had been born, and where many years of her life had been passed.

She was standing at the great door to welcome me, an upright and very handsome old lady, with beautiful, soft, dark eyes, still bright and clear,

and a quantity of waving hair white as driven snow. She was dressed in black satin, with some rich old lace yellow with age about her neck and wrists, and a cap upon her white hair. I thought for the moment that I had never seen anybody quite so striking or so handsome before, and the impression did not fade with time. Young people have a sort of undefined idea that beauty belongs to them alone, and fades away when youth is gone. I was startled—actually startled—when I looked into my grandmother's face to see how beautiful it was. The smooth red and white fairness and peach-like bloom had of course left that face; but the lines traced by the hand of Time had given to it a power, a pathos, a sweetness, and a charm far beyond anything that mere richness of coloring, or smoothness of texture, could bestow; and I looked at my grandmother with undisguised admiration not unmixed with awe.

She received me with a motherly kindness and authority that put me at ease at once. I found that here I had no option what I would do or what I would take. My weakened frame and feeble powers were not taxed by any efforts to think what I wanted, or select for myself which of two courses I should pursue. Everything was settled for me, and a sense of absolute rest and security stole upon me that acted like a charm.

I grew stronger every day. I made a start from

the very first, and my recovery, if not rapid, was steady and satisfactory.

Lydgate was a most delighted house and peculiarly beautiful. The house with its pointed arches and delicate tracery was a perfect feast to the eyes, and the smooth square of sward inclosed was one of my most favorite resting-places. The whole atmosphere of the house seemed to breathe a sort of stately calm and repose, as if the battles of life were over, and the rest of eventide drawing near. It was like nothing I had ever before experienced, and the influence exercised upon me was very great.

I grew, too, to be very fond of my grandmother. This love did not spring up all in a moment, as did my admiration for her undoubted beauty; for a time I was afraid of her, with that fear that is not unwholesome in the young and has a fascination of its own. I liked to see her come into my room, and was sorry when she left. I liked to watch her from my window as she paced in her stately way to and fro upon the terrace, wondering what she was thinking of — what memories and pictures lay beneath those deep eyes of hers so often fixed in dreamy abstraction upon the purple distance. My grandmother did not now seem old or uninteresting; I thought about her a great deal; in fact, she occupied the central position in my fancies just then, and any little story or reminiscence of past

days that fell from her lips was carefully treasured up in my memory.

One thing that greatly struck me about her was her peculiar *goodness*—that was the word I used to myself, and yet it hardly conveys my meaning. My grandmother never "talked good," as my brothers phrased it. She did not startle one by searching questions or aspirations so very trying to the young, nor did she embarrass the conversation by the sudden introduction of sacred words and names; or use Bible quotations as arguments in order to silence where she could not convince, as I have heard many well-meaning yet unwise people do. No; my grandmother was herself a reserved and silent woman; moreover, she was imbued with a sound and practical common sense that I have never seen equalled, and which gave her a power and discernment rarely to be met with. Every one came to her for advice, as it seemed to me; and seldom did they go away without having received just such counsel as they most needed. The confidence she inspired was something marvellous, as was also the deep and true veneration with which all regarded her. None but a *good* woman ever could awaken and hold such feelings as these, and yet, as I have before said, nobody could have been more reticent as to her private religious convictions.

The matter lay just here; my grandmother

'walked with God'—she lived so near to Him that it seemed as if the light of His countenance shone upon her. There was no need for her to talk. She won all hearts by the beauty of her life. I sometimes looked at her with awe, and wondered how she had attained this lofty height.

I paid a long visit, I learned to know and to love my grandmother well. Her reserve and my shyness melted gradually, as we grew nearer to one another. She loved me in time, I think, as dearly as I loved her, and the memory of those days we passed together is one of the sweetest and most sacred of my past life.

In time, of course, I learned many leading facts regarding that long life which had already lasted as long as the present century (my grandmother was born in 1800); but for some time I was ignorant of many connecting links and of much of the early-history of that life, and I felt as if I should like the picture more defined and more complete.

"Tell me about yourself, grandmother," I used often to say, in those days, as we sat out in the fragrant garden or in the cool shady rooms.

Then grandmother would smile and answer, "More about myself, you insatiable child? I should have thought you had heard more than enough already about an old woman like me."

And one day, having learned already a great deal, my request took a new form.

"Tell it me all from the beginning, grandmother, please. I want it in a long story, and then I can fit in all the little pieces that I know already."

Grandmother smiled, and a far-away look dawned in her eyes.

"From the very beginning?" she questioned softly; "nearly eighty years of sunshine and shadow."

"You do not mind telling me, do you?" I asked, looking up at her. "I know you have had a great many troubles; but you do not mind talking of them now, do you?"

The beautiful old face put on a look which in its strange, sweet softness and brightness I can never forget.

"My dear," she said, "when we have climbed the hill of life so nearly to its summit that the pearly gates seem very near, and the dark, shadowy valleys below so very far away, no backward glances can be very painful. Our dear ones, who are not lost but gone before, are nearer to us perchance, waiting for us in the great eternal home, than if we had left them toiling up behind us through the desert we have traversed ourselves. No, my dear, it does not hurt me now to talk of the past. You shall have the story from the beginning."

I shall try to give it in her own words. I know that I shall lamentably fall short of the charm of

narration with which she indued her history, but I shall do my best. If I fail in telling a tale well worth the hearing, the fault will be mine, not hers.

This then is the story of my grandmother's life.

CHAPTER I.

MISS LOVEL.

I WAS an only child; and I was born in Lydgate, of which, as I grew up, I was taught to consider myself the mistress.

My father died when I was five, and I only retain of him the most dim and distant recollection. My mother was a beautiful and delicate woman, little better than a chronic invalid, whom I loved with a protecting and caressing love, hardly natural, and certainly not usual from child to mother.

Under the terms of my father's will, Lydgate and all the Lovel property passed straight to his only child. My mother had her own property and the jointure under her marriage settlement, and the estate was left entirely to me, with the stipulation that my mother should have the right to live

at Lydgate so long as I remained unmarried. She was also sole guardian and executor.

Some people told me that it was a curious will, and treated me more like a son than a daughter; but I was too young to heed or to understand very much what they meant, and I gloried in the possession of my beautiful house, and in the adulation and admiration it insured for me.

As a child this feeling of pride and vanity might not have hurt me much; but unhappily it was not a mere childish dream that filled me with a sense of my own importance, but a solid conviction that grew with my growth and became a part of my very nature. Everything tended to feed and develop this master passion. The old servants could not make enough of me. I was a fine, high-spirited child, with a strong will and a good temper—a combination that generally contrives to win favor and hold hearts in thrall. I was told of my beauty, my wealth, my high position, from the day I began to understand or notice what was said, and my father's death turned me into a little queen to whom all seemed ready to do homage.

When I rode my spirited pony beyond the park gates, the tenants would come to their doors and curtsy or touch their forelocks to the little mistress, and bless her bonnie face. When I bestowed upon the sick and aged the gifts it had cost me nothing to tender, not even the price of a thought, I was

called a "little angel" and made to believe myself a true Lady Bountiful. The gentry round made a fuss over me every time I went to their houses. I was praised for my beautiful dark eyes and my wealth of nut-brown hair. I was told I should make hearts ache some day, and the peculiar style of my beauty was plainly discussed and praised. My long minority, they said, would make the estate of double its present value, and although a great deal of what I heard was quite unintelligible, I learned enough to be convinced that I was a person of the very first importance, and that great triumphs were before me in the future, and I gloried in this knowledge.

My mother, who, had she been a stronger or a more experienced woman, might have stopped a great deal of the foolish talk that went on, or at any rate have been a counterbalancing influence to the impression produced, was too much the invalid, too much weakened in body and mind, to understand fully the harm that was being done me by all this adulation, or to take any active steps to counteract it.

She had drooped visibly since my father's death, and grew more languid and more fragile with each succeeding year. She always lay upon a couch, surrounded by every luxury that taste could desire and wealth procure. I can see her yet—pale, lovely, frail, and gentle—a mother to be tended,

caressed, adored ; but not one to whom a self-willed girl would look for counsel or help, nor one who would be likely to see when a check was needed or endeavor to enforce it.

My mother idolized me and could not see my faults. She gloried in my high spirits and exuberant strength and vitality. She had such confidence in my powers that even my wildest exploits hardly alarmed her. In common with the whole household she believed that no harm could befall any one so dashing and brilliant as I was in the days of my early youth.

So I went on my own way, unchecked and unheeding, finding life all roses, and never dreaming of the thorns that hide themselves beneath. I enjoyed every day and every hour of my life with an intensity only possible to certain temperaments and in certain surrroundings, and I told myself in thought, if not in word, that trouble could never touch *me*.

I grew up in this wayward, heedless fashion until I was seventeen, and my education was said to be completed and I ready to make my appearance in society.

I had before this enjoyed so much liberty that the period of emancipation did not present the same contrast to my former life that it does to many young girls released from the schoolroom.

I had spent each year a fortnight with my

mother's sister, Mrs. Otway, whose husband was a general in the army, and who saw a great deal of military society. During these visits I was never kept in the background, but was made much of by every one, flattered, caressed, praised; and I went about everywhere with my cousin Geraldine, who was almost as much the spoilt child of fortune as myself.

Still I was aware that I had been heretofore looked upon as the child rather than the woman, and indeed I was but a child in mind and heart as well as in externals. But when my seventeenth birthday had passed, and I was dressed, according to the fashion of the day, as a stylish young lady, instead of a great schoolgirl, then I began to study my appearance with great interest, and mightily pleased was I with my new dresses and costly ornaments.

I felt a sense of power rise within me, and I believed that great triumphs lay before me. I was at heart a child still; but I believed myself a woman now, and some of the woman's power and knowledge began to awake within me.

"Kate," said my mother to me one day at this time, "Mrs. Baskerville and her son are coming to stay here for a few weeks."

Now I had seen Mrs. Baskerville once or twice, for she genreally came to stay with my mother when I visited Mrs. Otway, and occasionally she

remained a few days at Lydgate after my return. My mother was very fond of her, but I do not think I was. I thought her a tiresome, straitlaced old lady, and was extremely indignant, sometimes, at the criticisms she made upon me and my conduct. Nobody else in the world ever dared to cast a shadow of reproach upon me, and I considered it an unpardonable affront. Still, as my mother was fond of her, and as she was a connection of my dead father, I tried to be civil to her when we did meet.

I was not, however, particularly pleased to hear of this prospective visit.

"Am I going to my Aunt Otway's, then?" I asked.

"No, dear. I want you at home."

My mother's delicate color flew up as she spoke these words. I could read her face like a book, and I saw at once that she had something on her mind.

"What is it, mother?"

"Why, nothing, dear Kate. What should it be? You see I shall want your help with two guests. I am not fit to entertain a young man. You have heard of Thomas Baskerville, have you not?"

"Oh, yes! Mrs. Baskerville does not let anybody remain in ignorance long of dear Thomas's virtues! I don't think I like young men who stay at home with mamma and have their praises sung forever by her!"

My mother smiled, but shook her head with a look of gentle reproach.

"Mr. Baskerville remains at home to take care of the property, which is a very fine one. Some day I hope you will visit the Mount and see it for yourself. Mr. Thomas Baskerville is a very rich man, besides being a good and dutiful son."

I tossed my head sómewhat scornfully. "Well, he is nothing to me in any case, and I do not know why he should come here."

My mother's sensitive color again rose, and I became assured that something was meant by this visit more than at first appeared.

"You have a secret," I said, curiously and coaxingly. "Now that isn't fair, for I never have secrets from you. Do tell me, mother, what it is."

My mother's color still continued to rise.

"My dear child, you do get hold of very odd ideas. What should make you think I have a secret? If I have, it is a very small one. Only this, that your dear father asked me before his death to wait until you had both grown up, and then make you and Mr. Thomas Baskerville acquainted. That is all—it is nothing very wonderful, you see."

Nothing very wonderful, perhaps; but my mind at once reached the right conclusion. Some people will tell you that it is the modern fiction of the day that opens the eyes of young girls to matters which they have no need to know; but I doubt if

this can be an exhaustive explanation of the matter.

Certainly I had had access to but few works of fiction. My mind had not been precociously developed by the attractions of a circulating library, and yet I knew perfectly well what was the significance of my dead father's wish.

I had enough of the woman in me to leap at once to a right conclusion, enough of the child to speak out my thought without the least hesitation.

"You mean that my father wished me to marry Mr. Thomas Baskerville?"

My poor mother flushed more hotly than ever.

"Dear Kate! How can you say such things?"

But I knew I had guessed right, and only laughed.

"I shan't marry him unless I like him very much, and I'm pretty sure I shan't do *that*," I cried.

"My love, be careful how you speak and think on such matters; believe me, we desire nothing save your greatest good. You know, Kate—at least you do not know, but you may some day have to learn—that the world is not the bright place you have always thought it, and that a rich woman is very helpless and often in danger, unless she has a good husband to help and guide her."

I jumped up from my seat and kissed my mother, but I was laughing all the time.

"Do you know," I began with mock gravity,

"that I really do feel equal to taking care of myself and my affairs without the worshipful help of Mr. Thomas Baskerville?"

And then I ran away, laughing, and ordered my horse, and took a grand gallop over the common.

It was a pity that my gentle mother had so innocently betrayed her secret. Girls at seventeen, whether or not they have steeped themselves in fiction, are full of romantic thoughts and aspirations. There is more romance in real life and in the pages of history than in all the novels that ever were penned, and I was as determined as most girls are that there should be nothing little or mean or sordid in my life and in my love. I myself had wealth enough for one household. He who came to woo me had no need to have a rent-roll in his hand nor a balance at his bank. I would wed for love alone; and many pictures did my fancy draw of the nameless, knightly stranger who should whisper vows of love in my ear and be rewarded with my heart and with my hand.

The idea of a possible lover in this solid man of wealth, this virtuous and dutiful Thomas Baskerville, filled me with a sort of mirthful scorn not by any means unpleasing to my vanity.

I knew that I was beautiful and winning; and I was so used to the knowledge that it hardly stirred me now; but it gave to me a sense of power that was very much to my liking.

The thought that I was to be the central figure of a little family romance amused me very much. I was acute enough to be pretty certain that this prospective marriage had been arranged for Kate Lovel and Thomas Baskerville by the united forethought of the heads of both houses, and I had little doubt of Thomas's readiness to fulfil his share of the compact—modesty was not my besetting sin, you will perceive.

But as for Kate—ah! that was a different matter altogether.

As I galloped my horse over the breezy common I pictured many amusing scenes—how my conduct would be watched, my words treasured, my looks examined, and my every action discussed and pondered over. I pictured how the fat Thomas (I had made up my mind that he was fat) would sit and gaze upon me, how he would plead his cause in awkward fashion, and how I should lead him on and then laugh at him. Not very profitable reflections, you will say; no, by no means; but they show the attitude of mind I was prepared to take up. I felt an added dignity in the thought that I was about to crush a cherished family scheme, and assert myself with a new sense of dignity. I quite longed for the Baskervilles to come, that I might show them my power and my pride.

My mother made no further allusions to the

secret I had so ruthlessly dragged out and discussed; and although she still colored vividly whenever the approaching visit of the Baskervilles was mentioned, I refrained from adding to her discomfiture by appearing to notice it.

I spent a good deal of time with my maid, altering, re-making, and adorning my various gowns and mantles, for I was determined to make a very grand appearance, and show Mr. Baskerville once and for all that Miss Lovel was not a person to be trifled with.

I will not describe to you the dress I donned to receive these guests at our six o'clock dinner, which was an extraordinarily late hour for those days. It would sound to you painfully old-fashioned and dowdy; but in those days it was the height of stylish elegance. I had purposely kept out of the way during the bustle of arriving, in order to show myself to the very best.

I took one long and satisfactory look in the long mirror, smiled at my own blooming reflection, and sailed majestically towards the drawing-room.

CHAPTER II.

MR. BASKERVILLE.

THERE was a murmur of voices as I approached the door, which told me that our guests were with my mother in the drawing-room.

I opened the door and entered, and saw that I had not been mistaken. Without casting a single glance at a tall figure outlined against a distant window, I went forward and greeted Mrs. Baskerville, and when the son was introduced I merely bowed, hardly so much as favoring him with a glance.

At the dinner that speedily followed, however, I had leisure and opportunity to study my right-hand neighbor. He did not speak much to me nor I to him, so that it was not difficult to steal glances at him from time to time. without any great danger of detection.

I hardly knew whether I was pleased or displeased with the result of my scrutiny, but I was forced to admit that Thomas Baskerville was very different from the man I had pictured.

He was very tall and spare—that I had observed when we went in to dinner—but even when sitting he showed indications of height and powerful build. His hair was dark, his brow square and massive, and his features were good and clearly cut. He was not, withal, a handsome man, nor one to take the fancy of a young girl. There was no fire, no dash, none of that gallant grace of bearing and manner that attracts the eye and heart of youth, for Thomas Baskerville, at five-and twenty, was grave and thoughtful beyond his years, a silent man, who felt more than he spoke, and was more likely to be popular with men and women older than himself, than with the young, the giddy, and the gay.

Nevertheless, his was a face that commanded respect and a certain half-reluctant liking. I felt that I could not make this man look the foolish and ridiculous object that the fat Thomas Baskerville of my thoughts had often been made to appear. I was half vexed and half pleased to find this man so different from the one I had pictured.

After dinner I played and sang, and he stood by the harp and watched me. He was fond of music, he told me gravely, but he could not per-

form himself. I tried to make him sing, but he would not, so then I offered to show him the garden, if he liked, as it was summer time and quite light and warm.

This offer he accepted, and we wandered about together a good while. I was so well used to liberty of action, so accustomed to do just what I fancied at the moment, that I had no idea there could be anything marked in wandering though a sweet, old garden in the twilight with any one, be it man or woman. I enjoyed myself and talked a great deal, and he enjoyed himself and said very little, and it was quite an hour before we found our way back to the drawing-room.

Next day we rode out together, and as he rode well and understood horses, we got on very pleasantly. I sang for him again in the evening, and we walked in the garden; again I talked to my heart's content—and I never was tired of talking—and he watched me and listened to me, as I afterwards found, with an ever-increasing pleasure, but I did not know that then, nor should I have cared if I had done so.

So day after day slipped by in the same quiet fashion, and days had merged into weeks before I had begun to wonder how the time had passed, or how long our guests would stay.

I had found the society of this young kinsman a pleasant variety in my lonely life. I had not

been accustomed to companionship in my daily walks and rides and light labors in the garden, and as all change is pleasant to the young, so was this change to me which constituted Thomas Baskerville my protector and friend.

But with me the matter ended there. I liked him. I liked to have a listener when I talked. I liked to feel that I was watched and admired and looked after by some one more interesting than the old servants and friends who had surrounded me from infancy. He gave food to my vanity and love of admiration, and I liked him; but that was all. With me things went no deeper than that, and of his feelings I never troubled to think.

It seemed to me that it was his business to look after himself as I looked after myself, and I had no consideration to spare for him.

But a day came when I was forced to give this matter some thought, however little I might care to do so.

In the twilight garden, one lovely summer's evening, Thomas Baskerville asked me to be his wife, and asked it in such a way that I could not look up in his face and give the saucy answer I had once planned. I could only stand still with my eyes on the ground, and tell him that I could not give him what he asked.

I had no vestige of love for him. I did not yet know the meaning of the word. So far I had never

really loved any one but myself, for the feeling with which I regarded even my mother was not sufficiently pure and unselfish to merit the name of love.

Kate," he said gently, and yet a little sternly too, "do you mean to tell me that you have no love to spare for me? Am I nothing to you, after all that we have said and done together?"

I looked up and saw that there was pain in his face, and it made me rather angry. Why did he expect me to care for him just because we had walked and ridden and talked together? He was not at all an interesting companion. I had always been forced to take the lead.

What had he done to make me like him? I felt indignant, and the consciousness that I had used some art in order to win his admiration, and had sometimes spoken words which would have better been left unsaid, did not tend to soothe me. When we feel angry with ourselves it is always a satisfaction to vent that anger upon somebody else, and the young really do often grow confused as to who is the true culprit.

"What do you mean?" I asked indignantly; "what have I said or done? I have only tried to make things pleasant for you on your visit. Why should I love you? Why should you expect it?"

"Ah, why?" he answered sadly. "Only, I suppose, because I love you so much."

I pouted and looked vexed.

"Well, I wish you wouldn't then. It spoils everything. Why can't people be happy without always falling in love? It is so stupid."

"I never fell in love before," answered Mr. Baskerville, quietly.

"Then I don't see why you need begin now."

He looked at me sadly, and by-and-by took my hand in his.

"Kate," he said, "look up at me, and let me see your eyes. No, do not frown, I will not try your patience too far; but tell me—have you ever loved?"

"No, never."

"And yet you could love, and that well!"

"I don't know, I'm sure, and I don't care to try."

"Yet I love you, Kate; you have made me love you. I would try to make you very happy if you would trust yourself to me. I think in time I could win even your love. Will you give me leave to try, Kate?"

The earnestness of his tone disturbed me, and I drew my hand sharply away.

"You have no right to call me Kate. I don't choose to have liberties taken with me."

"But I love you, Kate," he answered, not one whit abashed, "and love waxes bold."

"But I don't love you," I answered quickly;

"I don't, and I never shall do, and, if you say one word like this to me again, I will never speak to you so long as I live!"

And with that I turned and ran away, feeling much more like a spoilt child than the dignified Miss Lovel I liked to appear, and conscious that Mr. Baskerville was quite of the same opinion.

I felt very much annoyed with myself for not preserving that dignity of manner which I considered becoming to me as mistress of my own house, and exceedingly angry with him for having driven me into such an exhibition of temper.

I avoided him all the rest of the day, and treated him to my very coldest manner whenever we were forced to meet. I made it very plain to all that a quarrel had taken place. My mother looked anxious and troubled, Mrs. Baskerville grave and a little severe.

I slept in a room that opened from my mother's, and I generally brushed out my hair sitting beside her on the bed, for she retired early owing to her weak health, whilst I told her of any incidents of the day's work that had specially interested me.

To-night, however, I was unusually silent, and my mother presently said:

"So Mr. Baskerville has spoken to you, has he, Kate?"

"Yes," I answered pettishly. "Stupid fellow, why must he go and spoil everything!"

My mother sighed and asked gently, "Are you sure you never could like him, dear? He has many very noble qualities."

"Oh, yes, I dare say; but I detest paragons!" No, no, mother, I am not going to sell my freedom to anybody yet; and when I do, it will be to somebody very different from Mr. Thomas Baskerville."

"He is very good, Kate dearest," said my mother, still pleadingly. "So very high-principled—and—very religious, too, as I understand."

My eyebrows went up, and the corners of my lips went down. I am afraid my gentle mother did little good to her cause by such arguments as these,

"I am not good or religious," I answered recklessly. "There is plenty of time for all that, as one gets older. I mean to enjoy myself whilst I am young, and get all the fun I can out of life. I certainly won't marry anybody who wants to preach to me. My husband must think as I do on such points. Saints must be very slow company, as I always did say!"

My mother shook her head, but argument was not her forte, especially where her impetuous, madcap daughter was concerned. In her own gentle, clinging fashion, my mother was a good and a godly woman, but she lacked power to impress upon others any of her own convictions.

"I wish it could have been, Kate," she said. "You want a good, steady husband to keep you in

check. A woman's life is so beset with danger, and a man like that would be such a protection."

It was hardly an argument likely to serve the cause, when addressed to a young girl of my temperament. I merely laughed gayly.

"Keep me in check! What an inducement! Danger! Protection! My dearest mother, Kate Lovel is quite capable of taking care of herself. Never fear for me! I don't want anybody's help or protection. I am quite strong enough to rule my own destiny."

Wild, reckless words, which often echoed through my mind in the years to come! The young are often bold, with the boldness of inexperience, but seldom, I think, quite so openly defiant as I was then.

My mother gave up the struggle then, only saying softly and sadly—

"Your dear father so greatly wished it."

I kissed my mother, still laughing.

"I really cannot marry to please my dear father or my dear mother either. When I marry, it will be to please myself!"

I ran away laughing, feeling that I had come off rather brilliantly from this wordy battle, and much better pleased to discuss the matter with my mother than with Mr. Thomas Baskerville himself.

After that interview with my lover, our visitors very shortly took their departure. I was not sorry to hear that they were going, and yet I felt that it

would be a little dull without the company of my new acquaintance, whose admiration had given pleasant food for my vanity. I knew that I should miss the pleasurable excitement of feeling myself noticed and thought about. I began to think that life at Lydgate was just a little dull.

Before our guests left, I had one short interview with Mrs. Baskerville.

I regarded that lady with very mixed feelings. She, like her son, always commanded a certain amount of respect and admiration, however reluctantly accorded. There was a firmness and a candor about her which could not but be felt, and it was tempered by sufficient kindliness and consideration to inspire affection as well as respect. I certainly liked Mrs. Baskerville, and yet I stood a little in awe of her.

This was such a new experience for me that I was puzzled by it, and often tried to make out its cause. I do not think I was very successful in doing this then; but in looking back to those days now, with the experience of later life to guide me, I can see pretty plainly that what caused me mingled annoyance and diffidence in presence of Mrs Baskerville was her acuteness of perception, her power of analyzing and grasping character, and the very true yet not very flattering hints she sometimes dropped in regard to myself and my conduct. I, who was accustomed to consider my-

self above criticism, felt much astonished at finding any one bold enough to disparage my sayings or doings; and yet the very variety of the experience gave it a certain piquancy, and I was honest enough, with all my vanities and faults, to see that Mrs. Baskerville was often uncommonly near the mark in what she said, although nothing would have induced me to own as much to anybody but myself.

On the evening before their departure we chanced to find ourselves alone for a few minutes, and then ensued this brief conversation.

"So we are not to be any more to one another than simple friends, Kate?"

I colored, but answered by a saucy question:

"Did you wish it otherwise, Mrs. Baskerville?—you, who are so well acquainted with my faults?"

"Yes, my dear, I did wish it otherwise, for underneath your many faults lies a warm heart, and a nature that might grow into a very noble one, would you once give it a fair chance."

I curtsied mockingly; yet I was pleased to hear this compliment from such truth-telling lips.

"And you think that a husband like Mr. Thomas Baskerville would turn me at once into a model woman? What a paragon pair we should be!"

I always gave my natural levity full play before Mrs. Baskerville. I felt the temptation to shock her too strong to be resisted.

She did not, however, appear to resent my words, but a very earnest look settled upon her face. She rose, laid her hand upon my arm and looked into my face in a way that I did not understand, but that at once checked the flow of idle words that rose to my lips, and made my face grave too.

"My dear child," she said, with much quiet feeling, "you are still young, but not too young to understand that life is something more than a simple game of play. Do you know, Kate, that you stand in great danger of making sad havoc both of your own happiness, and that of those around you, by the invincible levity of your words and deeds? My child, remember that our lives are not given us to throw away on mere idling and pleasure-seeking. They are given us from God, to be used to His honor and glory. From those to whom much is given, much will be required. Have you ever thought of that when you have looked round you, with the pride of possession, upon your fair inheritance, and planned out the brilliant life you will lead?"

I hung my head and made no answer.

"My child," continued Mrs. Baskerville, gently, "do not delay that thought too long. For that which we sow we shall also reap."

I made a petulant movement and turned away. "I am very kind to my tenants, and do a great deal of good—they all say that. I am not a bit worse

than other people, and by-and-by, when I have more time, I dare say I shall be religious too."

Footsteps outside warned us that we were about to be interrupted, and I was glad of it. Mrs. Baskerville said softly:

"My dear girl, remember that our lives are to be framed after the pattern of One Who 'pleased not Himself.' The more closely we tread in our Master's footsteps, the greater our meed of happiness both here and hereafter. It is the bearing of the cross that makes the wearing of the crown."

I heeded her words little at the time; they seemed then but idle platitudes, but they came back to me later with a new significance.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE GAY WORLD.

AS I had expected, I did feel a little dull after the departure of our guests. I was awaking to a new sense of power, which my easy conquest of Thomas Baskerville had decidedly quickened.

It seemed to me as if I could bring the whole world to my feet, if only the chance were vouchsafed me, and I chafed a good deal at the seclusion of my home, and my lonely life, which had to be spent so far away from the gay world in which I would fain move and shine.

I felt myself growing old, and thought it very hard I should not be free to go about and see society as other girls did.

Something of my discontent filtered out in my talks with my mother, and the result was that in

the following year I was sent to my Aunt Otway's for three months in order to "come out."

Mrs. Otway was living in a new place, and therefore in a different house from the one I had visited before. General Otway had a new command, and now held a very important position in a large military town. He was a man of wealth and station, and his wife was a rich woman, too, so that their house was a centre of hospitality, and they were as gay as heart could wish.

All this my cousin Geraldine had told me in her letters, and very much delighted and excited was I by the prospect before me.

I was very warmly welcomed by my relatives, with whom I was a favorite. Geraldine and I were old friends and allies, and she seemed genuinely pleased to see me. We had a delightful time unpacking my trunks, and looking at all the new dresses and jewels with which I had been supplied. As we were both of us only daughters, we had a great variety of costly dresses and trinkets, and took a real pleasure, quite unmixed with envy, in each other's possessions.

She told me a great deal about her new home, her admirers, and her doings generally, and I listened with the deepest interest.

I soon threw myself heart and soul into every gayety which opened before me, and forgot everything else in the determination to be happy, and to

make myself attractive and important at all cost.

I took as my model my cousin Geraldine, whom I admired intensely in those days, and whom I thought the height of perfection and grace. Now I fear she was but a heartless coquette, who made light of all the most sacred feelings of our nature, and took pleasure in inflicting the keenest pain.

Her training was perhaps more in fault than herself for all this. She had never been taught to consider others, and she had not learned the lesson by any experience of her own.

What shall I say of these days? I could give many glowing descriptions of brilliant balls, gay water-parties, exciting horse-races, and dissipations innumerable, but to what end?

Suffice it to say that existence seemed to me then one long whirl of delight. I was entranced by the glamour of the life I led, and my head was completely turned by all the adulation I was receiving. As an heiress and a beauty I attracted much attention, and I was not slow to observe and enjoy the sensation I caused.

In justice to myself, I will say that I never set about intentionally to enslave any one. I could not help being gay and good-tempered and affable to every one I met. I was too happy not to treat everybody with a certain facile friendliness, and my manner no doubt deceived many aspirants to my favor without any effort on my part. But if I

caused others to suffer, I, too, was not to be spared at last.

Amongst my aunt's most regular visitors was a certain Colonel Henry Scrope. He was a distant connection of General Otway, and therefore allowed the *entrée* of the house in a fashion not accorded to many of the young officers. He was a favorite with the General, and indeed with the whole family.

When I first arrived Colonel Scrope had been away on some military duty, and although I grew to know him by name, he was still a stranger to me. Geraldine often sang his praises, and I think she wished to prepossess me in his favor. She did not want so poor a man as a husband for herself, but I think she wished him to make a good marriage, and thought that my fortune entitled me to the luxury of choosing for myself. I had always boasted to her that I would marry for love, and love alone; whilst Geraldine frankly admitted that she should not be rich at her father's death, and that she must look out for wealth.

I had been rather shocked at first by this bold statement, but the fine edge of my susceptibilities soon wore off in my new life, and I soon ceased to wonder at such a decision.

At length Colonel Scrope returned from his wanderings, and I found that my days of careless enjoyment were over forever. When first I saw

the young soldier, I unhesitatingly pronounced him to be the handsomest man I had ever seen. How far I should endorse that opinion now I can hardly say, but undoubtedly he was very good-looking, with a face and figure that defied criticism, and in addition to these advantages that nameless touch of melancholy and softness in voice and manner that does more to win a woman's heart than the most perfect features or faultless face.

Henry Scrope's eyes had a power of expression I have never seen rivalled anywhere. You will laugh when I add that they most resembled the eyes of a dog; but so it is. There was a mute pleading in their liquid depths, a trustful, watching patience in their every glance which is more like the look which is seen in the eyes of a collie dog than in anything else in the world.

Those eyes it was, I think, that did the mischief. I could not resist them. To me they spoke more eloquently than any words could do.

Henry Scrope was something like a son of the house, in the way that he came and went at my aunt's abode. He was always welcome, and at this time he took full advantage of the liberty accorded him. He was always at hand to escort us wherever we wished to go. He never grumbled at our exactions. The more we used him the better he seemed pleased. He was continually joining us in our rides, or asking leave to take us on the river in

his boat. He was with us often from morning till night, and we never tired of his company.

I was living all this time in a sort of dream, and never tried to analyze my own happiness. I was too inexperienced to guess from whence sprang all this intense joy that was like nothing I had before experienced. I drifted with the current and was content.

Once, and only once, was this state of tranquil joy disturbed, and in this wise.

Amongst my rejected suitors was a certain Captain Francis Lyon, the only one amongst many whose dismissal gave me any sense of pain or shame.

I had liked the young man, who was far more simple and manly than many of his fellow-officers; and I knew by instinct that the love he offered me was true gold, not the dross that many held out as genuine ore. I had felt sorry that my friendliness, and the liking I had shown him, had encouraged him to hope for more, and when I said I never could be his wife, I had told him that I would gladly be his friend.

This is not a very wise concession to make in most cases, but Captain Lyon was worthy of the trust reposed in him. He never spoke one word of love, but our friendly relations continued, and I was very fond of him, after a sisterly fashion.

One day about this time, as I chanced to be walking alone in the garden, wrapped in very pleasant

thoughts, which I did not allow to take too definite a shape, I suddenly saw that Captain Lyon had approached, and was regarding me with a look which I did not understand. His face was pale and he seemed disturbed.

I greeted him gayly, but he did not answer, and said, fixing his eyes upon me earnestly:

"Miss Lovel, may I ask you a question?"

"Of course you may."

"And you will not be offended?"

"Oh, no!"

Still he paused, and seemed reluctant to speak.

"Well," I asked impatiently, "what is it?"

"Miss Lovel," he asked, speaking suddenly and rapidly, "has Henry Scrope asked you to be his wife?"

My face flamed scarlet and my eyes flashed. I drew my head up haughtily, and answered, "No."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed the young man. "Then I have not come too late. Miss Lovel," he continued, speaking in the same rapid, yet incisive way, "I have no right to speak to you thus, save the right you have given me to be your friend, but I cannot keep silence. I must give you one word of warning. Henry Scrope *will* ask you to be his wife, and that before very long, but do not—*do not* be deluded by his soft speeches and appealing glances. *That man has no right to ask you or any other woman to be his wife.* Believe me that I speak

the truth; and never, never, give him what he asks."

Before I had recovered from my astonishment, my adviser was gone. He had spoken his warning, which still seemed to ring in my ears, and had departed.

Indignant, frightened, incredulous, I was never less mistress of myself; and at that moment I saw Henry Scrope slowly approaching, from the direction which Francis Lyon had taken.

I forgot everything then; warnings and fears alike fled away. What were meaningless words and mysterous hints to me? What was the world to me beside my love? For I loved Henry Scrope, and I was soon to know it.

CHAPTER IV.

HENRY SCROPE.

HE advanced towards me slowly, and when he drew near he asked:

"Who was that talking to you just now?"

"Captain Lyon."

"Ah!" answered Colonel Scrope, smiling, "he is not very fond of me."

"Why not?" I asked quickly.

The young man shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"Why indeed? Ah well, we cannot account for all our likes and dislikes, can we? Sometimes they seem born in us. Lyon has always been my enemy, for some inscrutable reason, unknown to me, ever since our paths crossed. I am told he is jealous of me, but really I do not know why he should be.

He is a good fellow enough, I believe, but crotchety —very crotchety."

I breathed freely once again. When we are young a few reassuring words are enough to overthrow our very worst fears. Hearing that Captain Lyon was peculiar, and had a grudge against Henry Scrope, was quite enough to undermine the effect that his warning might have produced. Jealousy would, I knew, prompt men to all kinds of unworthy subterfuges. I believed that Captain Lyon, jealous of his rival's probable success, had tried to poison my mind against him, and I deeply resented so unworthy a trick.

So, when Henry Scrope began to tell his tale of love (which he did with a grace and tenderness and ease that would have spoken to a more experienced woman of the glibness of long practice, but which seemed to me too beautiful and wonderful to rouse the faintest suspicion of insincerity), he poured it into willing ears. I was transported into a new world of intoxicating happiness, and he knew my answer before it had passed my lips.

He loved me, and I loved him. It was all so strange and wonderful and blissful, that I lost all sense of prudence, but I trusted him so utterly that I might in any case have done the same. I told him with a laugh of happy pride of Captain Lyon's warning, and laughed again to think how completely the ignoble shaft had missed its mark.

Scrope caressed me tenderly, but I saw his brow darken. I wondered for a moment if I had done wrong in making this confidence, but I gave the matter scarce a second thought. How could I keep a secret, even a small one, from the man I loved? Impossible! Henceforward we should have but one mind and heart in everything. He would conceal nothing from me, nor I from him.

So we exchanged our vows of unchanging love, and were happy as I think only young lovers can ever be. It is only youth that can feel the unalloyed bliss that comes from inexperience of life and its possibilities. It is not the highest form of happiness, but for the brief time that it lasts it is very sweet.

Everybody was pleased by the news. I believe that General and Mrs. Otway had tried to bring about this connection for their young kinsman. It was desirable from a worldly point of view that he should marry an heiress; but of course I never thought of that, I was wrapped in love's young dream. I thought only that I had found my hero.

My visit, however, was nearly ended, and I knew that my mother must be wanting me back. Postal arrangements in those days were not what they are now. Fresh plans were not made with lightning speed, and I made no attempt to change mine, even to secure a few more days of Henry's society. He must soon come to see my mother, and then we

could renew our vows, and grow more and more closely united in the sylvan solitudes that surrounded my lovely home.

I did not write to my mother of the important step I had taken. Letters were so slow and unsatisfactory that I would not trust my precious secret to their keeping. I had, of course, to obtain her consent to my engagement, as I was a minor and she my guardian; but I knew she would never raise any barrier in the way of my happiness, and I had no doubt as to what her answer would be. I was able to tell Henry, with the pride of certainty, that I was practically my own mistress in all things.

So I went home, restored to my old confidence and spirits.

Henry Scrope escorted me part of the way back towards my old home. Travelling in those days was tedious; but it did not seem so to me so long as Henry was my companion. He poured tender vows into my ear, talked of his changeless fidelity, and, as the time of parting drew near, wondered, with a gentle sigh, if I should prove as true as he.

"Henry," I said reproachfully, "how can you doubt me?"

"I do not doubt you. I know you are true as steel—I have boundless confidence in you and in your love. But the world is a cold and cruel place, and you are coveted by many for your beauty and

your high position. Many men are unscrupulous in the means they employ towards gaining their end. Suppose you hear evil reports of me? Suppose calumnies are again circulated about me and my life? Is your love strong enough to trust me through all?"

I laid my hand in his.

"Henry," I said, "I will never believe you anything but the best and noblest of men."

"You give me new courage. Promise me, Kate, that you will never condemn me unheard."

"I promise."

"And that you will love me always!"

"Always—forever."

"I shall come and claim you soon," he said. "I cannot wait too long for you. When will you let me come and take you away?"

My face was crimson, but I was not ashamed to raise it to his.

"You must come and see my mother, Henry, when you can get your leave; you must settle that with her. I am not of age yet."

"I cannot wait for that time! I must have you soon. You are not afraid to change the old life for the new?"

"Oh no!"

"And your mother? She will not stand in the way of our happiness?"

"Oh no, I think not. She is so sweet and

gentle—such a dear mother; but come soon, Henry. I shall so want her to see you, that she may learn to love you too. You will come soon, dear, will you not?"

"I will, I will!"

CHAPTER V.

MY LOVER.

I REACHED home at last; and as I drove up through the park to the fine old house, I felt a thrill of pride and joy in the thought that I should some day make this Henry's home, and that our happy lives would, in all probability, be spent in peaceful seclusion at the old home I loved so well. Never could it seem a dull place when Henry was master there. I felt more glad of my wealth and station in thinking how I could bestow it upon him than I had ever been in days of old.

I had left Lydgate feeling discontented, restless, almost depressed. I returned in the gayest of spirits. The happiness that had entered my life was all too new and wonderful to admit of even the faintest misgiving or fear.

My mother's welcome was very tender and sweet.

I felt, as I received it, how very good a thing it was to have a gentle, loving mother to come home to with every tale of sorrow or joy—a mother who was always ready with sympathy and comprehending tenderness. I never had the smallest wish to conceal any matter, great or small, from my mother. Her approval was so sweet, her disapproval so very gentle and reasonable, that I never felt any reluctance to discuss with her any and every question that arose concerning myself or others. My mother never visibly exerted her authority over me—I think it might have been better for me had she sometimes done so—but at least she was so dear, that her looks and words exercised great influence over me, even in my wildest moods. Mine was a nature more easily led than driven, and as I grew older I paid more heed to my mother's gentle counsels and suggestions than I had done in my days of childish wilfulness.

So it was not long after my arrival at home that I, sitting in the twilight by my mother's couch, told her the whole history of my love for Henry Scrope and the promise I had made him.

My mother was distinctly agitated, as I could tell by the trembling of the hands that rested on my head. It was natural that she should feel a good deal this confession, which was so all-important in the future of her only child; but I knelt

beside her with my arms about her neck, and told her that no marriage of mine could ever, ever change my love for her, and that she was to live with us here, and be taken care of by both of us, just as though I had never married at all.

"You are not going to lose a daughter, mother dear, but gain a son. Henry says he will be a son to you, and he is so noble and good. You will love him as soon as you see him."

"I will try, my darling, for your sake; but a stranger always make me nervous. We know nothing about him, Kate. I am not sure if I ought to consent without making inquiries, and I do not know to whom to go."

I smiled indulgently and stroked my mother's hair with a caressing, protecting gesture.

"I will tell you where to go—to Uncle Otway. Henry is related distantly to him, and you are wrong in thinking that we know nothing about him, for I know a great deal, and it is all to show how brave and noble he is. Ah, mother, have not our brave soldiers, who have saved the honor of our country, some claim upon us all? Now, mother, I am sure you must be very glad that I am loved by a man like Henry Scrope!"

My mother was vanquished. She said she must write to her brother-in-law before she could say more; but I knew that my cause was won, and that Henry would be received as a son.

"Is he a good man?" my mother once asked. "A man like Thomas Baskerville?"

I laughed gayly at the comparison.

"He is not at all like Mr. Baskerville," I answered; I am afraid I do not desire him to be. Mr. Baskerville did very well for a kind of pattern young man, to pay visits with his mamma and show how very exemplary he could be; but don't you think he would be a little tedious when it came to living always with him? Oh no, Henry is not *at all* like Mr. Thomas Baskerville."

My mother shook her head gently.

"Ah, Kate, you do not appreciate Mr. Baskerville. He is a very good man."

"I don't think I like good men!" I answered recklessly; "at least, not good young men. They are so dreadfully tame and serious. There was Captain Lyon. Everybody said how good he was —read the Bible to his men, and had such an influence over them, and all that. It sounds very nice and proper; but really I do think I like a little more dash and manliness. Now Captain Lyon always reminded me of Mr. Baskerville; but Henry isn't the least bit like either."

And then I launched out into eloquent praises of my hero, described his handsome face and figure, his eyes, his hair, his voice and manner, until anybody less patient than my mother would have been fairly sickened. But my mother listened with

placid interest, and promised to love my Henry for my sake, until he came to see us and could be loved for his own.

General Otway's answer to my mother's letter was most satisfactory. He spoke in warm terms of his young kinsman's character, parentage, and position in the army. He had already outstripped most of his contemporaries on the path towards fame and promotion, and would, no doubt, continue as brilliantly as he had begun. His antecedents were irreproachable, and if his wealth was not equal to mine, his family was, and there was no reason to doubt that, in due time, he would win both fame and fortune in the career he had adopted.

After receiving that letter, my mother gave her formal consent to our engagement, and Henry was pressingly invited to visit us.

He was not long in answering this invitation, and in person. General Otway, I suppose, made his way plain for him to get away, and before many weeks were over I had the intense happiness of presenting my "future" husband to my mother.

Henry was all that even I could wish, so gentle, so courteous, so filial in his attentions to my beautiful mother. He won his way to her heart, as he had won his way to mine, and we were all very happy.

One day, as we were riding out together, Henry asked:

"Where will your mother go when we are married?"

"Go!" I repeated blankly.

"I thought, under the terms of your father's will, that her right to remain at Lydgate expired upon your marriage."

I laughed, for I thought he was in joke.

"There is no question of right between my mother and me," I answered. "My home will be hers, of course, so long as she lives."

"That does not always answer," he said.

But I still could not believe he was doing more than teasing me, and all I said was:

"My mother will never leave Lydgate. Why, it would kill her; besides, I never could spare her, nor you either, for I know you love her too."

He looked at me rather oddly out of the corner of his eyes. I was much too young and inexperienced to have the faintest idea of his true meaning. One day he said to me:

"You must not keep me waiting long, my Kate. I am an impatient man. I want you to be my very own, and that soon."

"This seems happiness enough for the present," I answered, looking lovingly up at him. "Why should we wish for more just yet?"

He caressed me; but he was not satisfied.

"Men are selfish creatures, you know. I want to make sure of my happiness."

"Are you not sure of it already?

"Not till I can call you my very own. I want to make you my wife—then we can defy fate and the world together."

I did not understand his vehemence; but I put it down to his great love, and felt flattered by it. If he were so much more impatient than I, his love must be even greater than mine.

I told him he must speak to my mother. I could not act without her consent in such a matter; and by-and-by I innocently asked after Captain Lyon.

A very black look crossed Henry's face, and he inquired almost fiercely what made me think of him.

"Do not be angry with him," I said gently. "You know I never believed what he said."

But this allusion to the younger officer seemed to have upset Henry thoroughly, and he could not recover his placidity for some time. I was much struck at times like these, by the intensity of his love for me. Even trifles that seemed to interpose between us roused such deep emotion.

Girls at eighteen, when they are quite inexperienced in the ways of the world, and are besides, very much in love, are hardly expected to be discerners of character. I do not know that I was more blind than others in my place would have

my been, save, perhaps, that my training had made me more independent and headstrong in my judgments than most young girls.

On the following evening Henry said something to my mother about his impatience for the marriage. For myself, I was content to wait some time longer. I liked being engaged very much, and had no special wish to hurry on the course of events. But, then, Henry's wishes were of the first importance.

I did not for a moment suppose that my mother would oppose Henry's will, and made up my mind that a marriage out of hand would be the result of this conversation.

My mother asked how soon he wished the wedding to take place.

"In three months at latest," he answered, in what I thought rather a peremptory way.

My mother shook her head.

"I could not possibly consent to anything so quick as that," she answered quietly. "Kate is but a child still. She will not be nineteen till June next year. In the July or August of that year I will arrange for the marriage to take place; but not before."

I think I breathed a little more freely, to hear that I was to have a year more of unfettered liberty; but Henry's face grew very dark.

"My dear madam," he said with ill-repressed

anger, "surely you do not expect me to wait a whole year for your daughter?"

"Is my daughter not worth waiting for?" asked my mother, with unexpected firmness and promptness. "If you think not, you are at liberty to say so at once, and withdraw."

"Mother! Mother!" I remonstrated aghast; but these simple words seemed to recall Henry to himself.

He saw that he had touched upon one of the few points on which my mother was not to be trifled with. Gentle as she always was, on certain matters she could be firm.

"I bow to your decision, madam," he said. "I must smother my impatience as best I can."

But after that interview he seemed ill at ease, and not quite so gay or so loving as before. I had however, hardly time to detect this change before he was summoned back to his military duties. He left with very great apparent reluctance, and promised to return as soon as he could get another leave of absence; and when he went it seemed as if he took away the summer sunshine with him.

CHAPTER VI.

STRANGE TIDINGS.

I MUST confess that life at Lydgate seemed sadly stale after my lover had left us. In those days absence was a very different thing from what it can be now. It was a dreary blank, whose darkness was only occasionally relieved by a letter from the absentee. True, those letters, when they did come, made up for much. They were not like the flimsy modern epistles, dashed off in a hurry to catch the daily post, but bulky packets, containing a real detailed account of all that had passed since the last missive had been despatched. These letters were a great treat when they did come, but the intervals were long, and a sort of mist seemed to obscure all persons and places not within the immediate neighborhood, and shut us out from any sense of participation in the lives of those we loved.

This was more particularly the case with us at this time, for Henry was not a good correspondent. His duties, he said, hindered him from writing as fully as he would wish, and many weeks often went by without a sign of a letter.

My spirits at this time were fluctuating and uncertain, and sometimes I begged my mother to reconsider her verdict and consent to an earlier marriage—things seemed so dull and flat in the ordinary routine of home life. But for once my mother was resolute. She told me that patience was the greatest of all teachers, and that if I could not wait quietly for the realization of my happiness, it showed how much need there was for me to learn that lesson. I tried to listen with patience to these reflections, but I was fitful in my moods and altogether out of sorts; and I could not believe that anything disagreeable could be salutary.

In point of fact, I had been living for many months in an atmosphere of excitement and adulation, and I could not settle down to the old, quiet life with any sort of satisfaction.

I wanted change and excitement. I had tasted the delights of power and fascination, and I had drunk deeply of the cup of pleasure. It seemed to me as if the only way to be thoroughly happy was to live in a gay world of fashion, and join in a perpetual whirl of amusement, where a round of admirers was always at command to give zest to

each day's pleasures. I was in the worst possible frame of mind for meeting the blow of fate that was hanging over me and my future.

Summer had merged into autumn, and autumn was fast changing into winter, when this blow fell. It was a clear, bright November day, and I had been a long, solitary ride over the moors and through the woods, indulging in a reverie hardly likely to make me the more contented with my quiet, secluded life, and I had come home decided to have another battle with my mother, and win her consent to an immediate marriage.

I thought less of Henry and my love for him, than of my own dismal dulness, when I made this resolution. I had come to the conclusion that I was being buried alive, and was wasting all my youth and beauty where it profited me nothing, and I was determined to put an end to such an existence at all costs.

I did not particularly care about being married quickly, but it seemed to me the only escape from a life of hopeless monotony.

I went indoors in this unenviable frame of mind, and made my way to my mother's room. As soon as I looked at her, I saw that something had occurred to agitate her, and this made me feel somewhat injured, as I could not well disturb her further by an instant unveiling of my woes.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked rather

ungraciously. My mother tried to smile, as if at ease.

"I have had a visitor in your absence, dear," she said, trying to speak naturally. "A visitor who is a stranger to me, but not to you."

"What do you mean?" I asked pettishly. "Who has been here?"

"A Captain Francis Lyon. He tells me he knew you when you were staying at your aunt's house."

"He was one of the men who wanted to marry me," I answered with a little more animation than before. "Where is he now? Didn't he stay to see me even?"

"He is at the Lydgate Hotel. I have asked him to dine with us. Is he not the young man you spoke of as being so good?

"Oh, yes, he is good enough, I suppose; but I don't much like him. He can be mean and spiteful too. I think most good people are inclined to be that."

My mother did not answer, but only said:

"He looked very ill. He said he had been ill in the spring, and had never got over it."

How was it that Captain Lyon had come at all into this out-of-the-way place? What had brought him into Lydgate in the dreary winter days? Did this strange visit portend anything unusual? Could he be the bearer of any news, good or bad, which might have a special interest for me?

I pondered these questions many times as I changed my riding-habit for my dinner dress, taking pains with my toilet, so as to produce a favorable impression on Captain Lyon; but I left my room as ignorant and undecided as I had entered it.

My mother and the Captain were deep in talk as I entered the drawing-room, and, by the sudden stop my presence caused, I might have known that the conversation referred in some way to me. But I was thinking of the effect my appearance was likely to produce upon my former admirer, and heeded nothing else.

Captain Lyon greeted me quietly and courteously. I was struck by the change in his appearance from the last time that I had seen him. He looked, as I thought, very ill. His face was pale and thin, and he had aged ten years, as it seemed to me, since I had seen him that evening in the garden.

During the dinner hour he talked with something of an effort, and he avoided meeting my eye —or so I fancied—and was hardly at his ease. I had a great many questions to ask about old friends whom I had known at my aunt's house, and he answered them all, but did not seem to take any pleasure in reminiscences of past days.

I did not mention my lover's name, feeling sure that any allusions to him must be unwelcome and

out of place; but I was disappointed at finding the Captain so grave and uncommunicative.

When dinner was ended, and my mother and I had left our guest to entertain himself, I was about to begin a complaint of his dulness, when she spoke with a certain nervous haste.

"Captain Lyon and I have a little business matter to discuss together, my love. I have asked him to join me in the study. We will come to you here later, when our talk is over."

And my mother made a somewhat hasty exit, before I had recovered from my astonishment.

I spent a very uneasy and anxious hour by myself in the drawing-room. I could not imagine what important affair my mother could possibly have to discuss in which I might not take a share. As a rule, I was the one who undertook the management of all business matters. A presentiment of dread hung over me. I was oppressed and fearful, I knew not why.

After what seemed an endless time, my mother reappeared. Her face was pale and sorrowful, and her eyes looked as if they had shed tears. I saw that she had been through some trying ordeal; and I made her lie down on her couch before I asked one of the many questions that rushed to my lips.

"Where is Captain Lyon?"

"He has gone away."

"Gone away! I thought he had come to spend the evening here!"

"He came, dear Kate, to make some very painful disclosures to me; and, that being done, we both considered it best for him to go. We are hardly in the vein for a social evening."

My heart beat thick and fast. I was much disturbed, but would not show it.

"I suppose Captain Lyon has been maligning Henry. It is one of his noble ways. He has done it before, only I knew better than to believe it.

I was half afraid of my own words before they had left my lips; but my mother did not reprove me, she saw that I was not myself.

"Kate, my love," she said quietly, "we have both been greatly deceived, and my grief for you is very great, for your trust and love were wholly given to one who has proved himself a false and wicked man. My dear child, you can never be the wife of Henry Scrope."

I smiled a sickly smile. My mother was of so yielding a temperament, of such a timid, hesitating nature, that her calm certainty filled me with dismay. I was sure that, had the barrier been anything but insuperable, she would have been the victim of a thousand doubts and hopes and fears; but now she was simply decided and firm—a state of mind unusual with her. My heart sank, but I

gave no sign of any such despondency ; I answered cheerfully, and as I thought conclusively :

"It is to late too talk of all that now. I have promised to be the wife of Henry Scrope, and I mean to keep my promise."

"That is impossible, my love," answered my mother? "Henry Scrope has a wife already."

I sprang to my feet and laughed aloud, a harsh, unnatural laugh. Wild words of incredulity and scorn sprang to my lips ; but my mother checked me as quickly as possible.

"My dear," she said, "Captain Lyon has shown me the proofs, and you can see them with your own eyes ; but let me first tell you the story as he told it to me. Colonel Scrope and he came from the same place in the North, and were friends and companions in boyhood, though Henry was many years the elder. He was a reckless young man at all times, and when still quite young—hardly more than a boy—he made a private marriage with a pretty village girl with whom all the lads of the place were more or less in love. His family were greatly scandalized, and never recognized the marriage in any way. Henry grew heartily ashamed of it in a short time, and never really owned his wife at all. She went on living in her father's cottage, and he went off to the wars. She has never urged her claim upon him or his family, being, as Captain Lyon tells me, a good and humble-

minded woman. She married him for love, after having stood out for long against his pleading, knowing herself unsuited to him in rank and station; and she has never ceased to love him, in spite of his desertion of her, which she has felt most cruelly. She has one little boy, who is really Henry Scrope's heir. The mother, Captain Lyon tells me, is slowly dying. She loved her husband too well not to pine after him, and she has been slowly sinking for many years in a sort of decline. In all probability, Henry Scrope will be a free man in six months' time; but I think that neither you nor I can ever forget that at the time he wooed and won you, and would have made you his wife, he had already a wife living."

I sprang up and paced the room in great agitation. The ground seemed slipping away from under my feet. I might profess to disbelieve the news I had heard, but in my heart I was convinced of its truth. I knew that Captain Lyon would never raise a charge which he could not substantiate. I had been deceived—grossly, cruelly deceived—and that by the man on whom I had expended the whole wealth of my young love. My mother presently began to speak again.

"You see, Kate, Henry Scrope knew that Captain Lyon was the only man that you were likely to come across who knew the secret of his early marriage. His family always declined to consider

him married, and were delighted at his engagement with an heiress. You would not have heard the truth from them. The only danger lay in Captain Lyon's possible line of conduct. If Henry Scrope had been able to persuade us, he would have made you his wife."

"I can't believe it! I can't believe it!" cried I, wringing my hands together in uncontrollable emotion.

"My dearest love, I am grieved for you—more grieved than I can say," answered my mother; "but, believe me, it is the best way to face facts, and not to fight against them. It is more painful at the time, but the cure is more speedy and complete. Listen farther. When Colonel Scrope went back to his quarters, knowing that he could not hope to marry you till next year, and when Captain Lyon's health was returning, he found him out and assured him, on his word of honor as a gentleman, that his wife was dead, and had died before he asked you to be his wife. So earnest was he in his protestations, that Captain Lyon almost believed him, but could not be satisfied without visiting his native place to ascertain if this really were the case. It was with difficulty that he obtained leave of absence, for Colonel Scrope resolutely opposed its being granted, and put endless difficulties in the way. (He seemed to have some premonition of his former friend's purpose.) It

was only last week that the visit was made. The wife is still living, though, as I say, in the last stage of decline. As soon as he had made sure of his facts, and obtained a few proofs of his story, he came here to communicate with me. He apologized humbly for interference in a matter which was no affair of his, and which could only bring pain to all concerned ; but as he was the only man living who knew and would disclose the true facts of the case, his conscience would not let him rest satisfied without doing so. I told him, in your name and my own, that we thanked him from our hearts for his timely revelations."

I made no answer. I could not yet grasp what had befallen me.

"Did General Otway know?" I asked.

"No, no! He had no idea of such a thing. No one knew save the nearest relatives of the young man. My brother-in-law is but a distant connection. No one there had even a suspicion. This marriage took place so early in his life, and was so completely ignored, that those who have known him for years would find it very hard to believe in such a thing. Nobody is to blame but the poor, misguided young man himself."

"I promised never to condemn him unheard!" I cried, still resisting passionately.

"You can write to him, Kate," answered my mother. "I cannot permit you to meet him again

at present; but you can write. I will send a special messenger with your letter, who shall bring the answer back. If this is any satisfaction to you, you may do it."

I wrote my letter that very night. I poured out my whole soul in passionate pleading, and in appeal to know the truth, and promised to trust him in spite of all, if he would only deny the cruel charge trumped up against him. It was a foolish, almost a wicked letter, prompted by the wayward spirit that stirred within me. If my mother had read it, it would have shocked her dreadfully; but she trusted me more than I deserved, and my letter went as it was.

Never week was longer than the one which followed the despatch of my missive. The hours seemed to crawl. I fumed and fretted, and wore myself and my good, patient mother almost into a fever, with my ceaseless speculations, and my resentment against Fate. But at last the messenger arrived and the letter was brought. It only contained a few short sentences, almost brutal in their abrupt incisiveness, and characteristic of the true nature of the man—nature I had never really known.

"Dear Miss Lovel,—The little farce is played out and over. It was very pretty whilst it lasted; but, thanks to that meddler, whom I must repay in

my own way, it is over now. I don't much think we were well suited to each other after all, so perhaps it is all for the best. Your mother and your home were a little too solemn and stately for me I shall always think pleasantly of our little early romance.

"HENRY SCROPE."

That was all the answer I received to the letter in which I had poured out my whole soul in unalterable devotion. I was filled with a burning shame and anger like nothing I had ever before experienced. I did not show the letter to my mother, who was anxiously watching me, but burst into a passion of tears, and sought my own room, where I shut myself up in solitary misery, to nurse my grief and humiliation for the best part of a week.

At the end of that time, by the ordinary channel, I received a letter from my cousin Geraldine. The concluding words ran as follows:

"That handsome, wicked Colonel Scrope has come unexpectedly into a fortune, and is more popular than ever. His story is known now; but as his wife is dying, nobody seems to think it matters much. Why did you not wait for him? I suppose you were really tired of one another. He says he shall never try to marry an heiress again. They are much too independent and fond of their

own way. He can please himself now that he has this money; and he will have no difficulty when that poor creature does die, for he is more fascinating and delightful than ever."

I read this letter with feelings of uncontrollable disgust. In the times of which I write, morality in high circles was at a very low ebb. Thus it was that Scrope's late conduct excited little or no criticism amongst his fashionable acquaintances; but to me this revelation of the way in which the world regarded such things was horrible. My better nature, as well as my pride and vanity, were sorely outraged, and I began to feel a healthy detestation of the man whose image I had so cherished in my heart that at last I had made of it an idol.

I tore Geraldine's letter into fragments, and flung it into the fire.

"Henry Scrope!" I cried passionately, "I believe you are the worst man that ever lived! I shall never waste another thought or regret upon you!"

CHAPTER VII.

DARK DAYS.

IT will easily be believed that the next few months passed drearily enough for me.

I was intensely humiliated by the episode in my life that I have just related, and humiliation is about the hardest thing that a girl of my proud and self-willed nature can be called upon to bear.

I had been so confident of my own power to shape my destiny according to my own wishes—I had looked upon myself as so irresistible, in my beauty, my wealth, and my youthful strength—no doubts as to the success of any scheme in which I embarked had ever seriously crossed my mind. I believed in myself and my own cleverness with a tenacity of self-confidence that seems almost incredible to me now. I had climbed to so great a height that my fall was proportionately severe.

After all my grand romantic dreams of love and

chivalry—after all my vows and protestations that I could never be deceived, and could always distinguish true gold from dross—after having cast away in disdain more than one true and honest love—I had myself fallen a victim to a worthless fortune-hunter. He had duped me with protestations of love, which he had no right to speak to any woman but his wife, had grown weary of me even whilst he professed to play the lover, and had joyfully cast me off and made light of me, so soon as a change in his affairs enabled him to feel independent of my fortune. I had given him all the wealth of love which my heart could spare from itself. He had given me nothing but a little admiration and the dregs of a love that had been wasted on too many objects to have any value or power left.

I was profoundly and horribly humiliated. I could not endure to think of all the love I had lavished on such an object. I often writhed as I thought of the letters I had written him, which letters he had not even had the grace to return.

I went about in those days, restless, angry, miserable. I would not allow even my mother to speak upon the subject that was never absent from my thoughts. I brooded alone in sullen silence, and nursed my wrongs until they assumed proportions of the most gigantic kind. I grew intensely morbid, and was a different being from the gay

Kate Lovel, who used to keep the old House alive by her gayety and spirit.

I think I need hardly say that at this time I had no belief at all in the power of a Heavenly Comforter and Friend. Religion I had none, beyond a formal observance of church-going, and a daily prayer spoken from the lips whilst the heart was far away. So far from any of the yearnings after the mysteries of God which sometimes haunt the young, and lead them on to light and truth, I held all such matters in a sort of contempt, none the less real because it was unspoken.

People, I thought, must be very poor creatures who could not pass even a day without prayers for guidance, help, comfort, and what not, instead of trusting to their own decision and determination of character to bring about what they desired.

The frame of mind which is ready to give up all in answer to a call from above seemed to me an absolute and hopeless folly.

I had no real belief in God, nor in the power of prayer, nor in a hundred other matters that I accepted as a matter of course, as I accepted the truths of science which I neither understood nor cared about. Actual infidelity, that openly proclaimed itself as such, was not so much the fashion of that day as of this. I never spoke of my incredulity or contempt for religion; but none the less did the feeling grow and increase within me.

The shock my self-confidence had received, the sore need in which I stood of help and counsel, never softened or moved me. I should as soon have thought of going to my Bible for help, or of kneeling down and asking counsel from God, as of praying to the bronze statues in the hall. The thing, had it been suggested to me, would have appeared an idle mockery, and nothing would have convinced me that happiness and contentment were within my grasp, if I would but tear away the veil from my eyes and from my heart, see myself as I was, and go as a penitent sinner to the foot of the Cross.

No; I preferred to go my own way and think my own thoughts. Had counsel of such a kind been offered me, I should have spurned it. As it was, nobody ever spoke to me on such subjects; I was left alone to commune with my own heart, with what profit I might.

My mother, as I have said, was too gentle, too diffident, too simple-minded, to attempt to lead or guide me. I believe she never doubted that I was good and devout, so far as my youth and high spirits allowed me. The young, she no doubt fancied, require a good deal of liberty, and were by nature careless and thoughtless; but I am certain she had no worse thoughts of me than these, and was content to wait till time should sober me down and give a graver tone to my nature.

As for me, I never dreamed of discussing religious topics with my mother. I had no interest whatever in them, and had no wish to shock or pain her by a levity of speech which I knew would be the result of an interchange of ideas on these points. I had a sort of contempt for the little devotional books that often lay upon my mother's table, and called them "Popish" or "sentimental," and said to myself, with a certain self-complaisance, that if people had the Bible, I did not see what more they could need—regardless of the fact that I never opened the Bible that lay mutely reproachful upon my table week after week and month after month. I was in a frame of mind which took pleasure in finding out the mote in the eyes of others, whilst hopelessly blind to the beam in my own. I think I could not have been a lovable or a pleasant companion in those days.

When the summer came upon us, I received a further shock to my outraged feelings. My cousin Geraldine wrote to say that of course she and her parents would be very pleased to see me if I cared to pay them a visit, but she was not sure that I should wish to do so, as it was only fair to tell me that Henry Scrope was now her affianced husband. His wife had died in the spring, and they had been engaged almost at once, and hoped very soon to be married. Henry was a rich man now, and rising

in the profession, and the match was looked upon as a fairly brilliant one.

With the spice of malice common to most girls of her type, she proceeded to inform me how Henry had never really cared for any one but her all along; but knew once that he could never aspire so high, and had tried to content himself by the "little cousin" whose pretty face and long purse had proved an attraction for a time. But he had soon wearied of the game. He did not care for little girls long, and really, what with my waywardness, my mother's obstinacy, and the dulness of Lydgate, he was very nearly breaking the whole thing off when he was down with us. The bait offered by my fortune, however, had still kept him dangling on; but he was unfeignedly glad when my "heroics" and his own increase of means enabled him to cast adrift again.

"You see, my dear cousin," concluded Geraldine, "you played your cards very badly, and let him see your hand. Men like uncertainty, and suspense, and excitement. They do not care for a woman who is always saying how she loves. Let them do the love-making, whilst we stand aloof and condescend to allow it; but so soon as we once turn love-makers, as you did, so surely all our power is at an end."

This was not exactly a pleasant letter to receive, and I was furious. I felt that I hated my cousin as

bitterly as I hated my false lover; and the thought that those two talked and laughed together over my blighted hopes and childish exhibition of love drove me almost to distraction.

My reply to Geraldine was anything but conciliatory. I wrote my opinion of her and of Colonel Scrope far more plainly that I had any right to do, and the consequence was an entire break in our correspondence. It was a long time indeed before I saw or heard anything more of my cousin.

Mrs. Baskerville was coming to see my mother. I was not much pleased to have to meet her; but it could not now be avoided. I had no relatives or friends, save the Otways, whom I ever visited, and their door was now closed to me.

I could not help wishing that Thomas Baskerville was to be of the party. A painful craving after excitement had seized me—anything, anything to drown thought, and give food to my vanity and love of pleasure. And then a new thought seized me, and took powerful hold of my imagination.

Why should not I show Henry Scrope that I cared for him as little as he cared for me? If he was going to marry my cousin Geraldine, why should not I marry my old admirer Thomas Baskerville?

This idea possessed me forcibly, and was very characteristic of my state of mind at the time.

It was characteristic that I should have no doubt of the readiness of my old lover to renew the suit I had utterly rejected two years ago. He had never married all that time, so of course he must have remained single for my sake.

It was characteristic that I should have no sense at all of the great wrong I was meditating towards the man I proposed vowing to love, honor, and obey. I was using him as a means of gratifying an outraged vanity; and ran the risk of ruining his life, simply to show my faithless lover how little I cared for his desertion, and how quickly I consoled myself.

It was characteristic that I should think of self, and only of self, all through this matter; deeming it an honor for Thomas Baskerville to call himself my husband under any circumstances whatever, and caring for nothing but the gratification of my own folly and pride.

It was characteristic, too, that I utterly failed to see anything mean or wrong in the proposed course of action. Whatever Miss Lovel chose to do must of necessity be high-minded and right.

After I had reached this conclusion, my spirits rose a little, and I braced myself with energy for the part I was about to play.

I did not know exactly what course to take in order to bring Thomas Baskerville once more to my feet; but I never doubted my power of ulti-

mately effecting this object. My mother might have helped me, if I had taken her into my confidence; but this I did not choose to do.

Mrs. Baskerville arrived in due course, and was very gentle and tender in her manner towards me. She had heard from my mother the outline of my troubles, told in language far different from what I have set down here, and her kind heart yearned over one who, whilst still so young, had suffered so keenly. She evidently regarded me as a different being from the laughing girl of two years back; and indeed I felt myself to be entirely changed. But whilst she took it for granted that sorrow had ennobled my nature, I might have known, if I had allowed myself to think, that, so far, it had but caused its deterioration.

The first time that I was alone with our guest was upon the evening of her arrival, when my mother, according to her custom, had retired early to her room and her bed.

"My dear," said Mrs. Baskerville then, very gravely, "I am so shocked and grieved to see this change in your mother."

I opened my eyes wide in surprise.

"Change!" I echoed, "what do you mean?"

"My dear, you cannot have failed to observe it. She has altered most sadly. Have you suggested that she should see some talented physician? Or

are you afraid of alarming her by the thought of such a thing?"

I sat silent and aghast. I had been so entirely absorbed in my own affairs and feelings during the past year, that my mother's gradual decay of power had passed absolutely unnoticed. It is not easy to observe a change in any one with whom one constantly lives; but there had been in my case a carelessnesss and culpable selfishness that had blinded my eyes to everything but my own sorrows.

"I—I—did not know she was worse that usual," I stammered.

"But surely you must have been growing very anxious of late?"

"I don't know. Mother never says she is ill. It is so hard to judge of people with whom one lives!"

Mrs. Baskerville evidently though I was trying to fight down a dreaded conviction, and her manner grew increasingly kind and motherly.

"I do not want to distress you, my love; but sometimes it does more good to face a distant possibility, however sad, than to shut our eyes to it. Your mother may still have many years to live—I hope I may say so much—in spite of appearances. But you must not blind yourself to the ultimate future."

I was gazing with frightened eyes at our guest.

"Do you mean—that you think—that mother is going—to *die?*" I asked in a series of gasps.

"My dear Kate, you must try and be calm; but I think you had better not fight with the truth any longer. It is time you looked the question in the face. Your dear mother looks dreadfully ill, and is in a state of weakness that must cause us great anxiety."

"Do you think she will *die?*" I whispered again.

"God alone knows the future, my love; we must leave that in His hands; but I fear she cannot be much longer for this world."

I waited for no more, but burst into a passion of tears. I knew that Mrs. Baskerville was trying to comfort me; but I would not hear or heed, and only rushed wildly from the room with my face hidden in my hands.

"She will die! She will die! She will die!" I cried again and again in the fierceness of my grief and self-reproach, as I flung myself upon my bed in an agony of weeping. "She will die—the only one who ever loved me; and I shall be left quite alone—quite alone! And yet people pretend that God is kind and good!"

And with that wild climax of defiance and anger, I sobbed myself to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SECOND BETROTHAL.

THE fierce, passionate grief of the young is not always long-lived. When I awoke next morning to the quiet routine of my daily life, and saw my mother occupying her customary couch, and tranquilly happy over her books and her needle work, I began to feel as if my outburst of last night had been a wild dream, and I fancied that Mrs. Baskerville had frightened me for nothing.

Yet, as I watched my mother with unusual attention, I did notice for the first time how very, very pale and thin and shadowy she had become; how feeble were all her movements; how incapable she was of exerting herself even over what seemed mere trifles to others; how one by one, and by imperceptible degrees, she had dropped all habits which involved the smallest exertion of strength,

and had become, although I had not realized it, a confirmed invalid.

I had grown so used to consider my mother as very fragile and delicate, that these gradual changes had given me no uneasiness; but when the idea was suggested to me, I could not deny that she was changed, and I was vaguely alarmed and distressed.

I do not think I had ever seriously thought of losing my mother. She was so young-looking, in spite of her chronic ill-health, and lived so quiet and shielded a life, that it did not seem possible for death to come near her. I never could imagine what my home would be like without her gentle presence, nor what my life could be without the ceaseless love and watchful sympathy that seemed to form a sort of background to all that concerned me. I did not think much of my mother from day to day, and yet what a blank there would be if she were to be taken from me

Some such thoughts as these forced themselves into notice many times during the following days, and I went about more thoughtful and dreamy than was my wont. I would not allow myself to believe that my mother's life was in any danger; but I nevertheless felt strangely tender over her, and felt as if I would do anything in the world to give her the smallest pleasure or satisfaction.

How could I please my mother? This question

was often in my mind, and one day an answer seemed to shape itself within me which made my cheek flush and my eyes brighten.

"If your mother is really ill, and knows herself to be so," said the voice from within, "nothing could give her more happiness and relief than your marriage with Mr. Thomas Baskerville."

This idea came with startling suddenness, and with a force that almost took my breath away. Yet it was not at all unwelcome, for, as I have before explained, I was seriously contemplating an attempt to bring my old lover once more to my feet, and this new motive for such a deed had a grace and a flavor of filial devotion about it which it certainly could not be said to possess before.

Motives are complex things, and the young are easily deceived, for they do not love close analysis. I cannot even now distinguish how much was wounded vanity, how much girlish folly and spite, and how much a wish to bring comfort and pleasure to my mother, that actuated me in the resolute determination at which I arrived that I would, at all risks, marry Mr. Thomas Baskerville.

I might have been at a loss how to commence the undertaking I had planned, had not my way been unexpectedly made plain.

Mrs. Baskerville had been very kind to me, and had taken much more notice of me upon this visit than on any former occasion. Since her communi-

cation upon the night of her arrival, as to the state of my mother's health, she had not again alluded to the subject; but I could tell that she thought about it and noticed my solicitude towards her, and the common bond of sympathy certainly drew us more closely together.

Then, too, I had more to do in entertaining our guest than in bygone days. My mother never left the house, save for a turn along the terrace in her wheel-chair. She used in warm weather to lie out a good deal under the open arches; but she never drove out now.

So it came about that I drove Mrs. Baskerville in my pony carriage, and walked with her in the garden, and we grew far more intimate than we had done before. Something in this friend's manner had a salutary effect upon me, and I seldom felt inclined to talk to her in the wild and flighty way I often adopted. I felt sobered down and made serious by her quiet seriousness, and I think she thought me much improved.

I did not mean to be insincere, and I did not try to produce a false impression. I merely followed out the impulse of the hour, as was my way; but there is no doubt that Mrs. Baskerville thought much more highly of me than she would have done had I shown myself as I really was.

And one day, quite unexpectedly, came a climax

that I had never dreamed of bringing about with so much ease.

She had been talking to me again of my mother's state of health one evening after the invalid had retired, and told me gently, and yet with a certain firmness, that she was very much afraid another winter would put the finishing stroke to the life that was so very frail.

She had seen a good deal of this kind of gentle, insidious decline, having lost more than one relative much in the same way, and she could not think it real kindness to shield the truth from me.

I did not cry this time, only I felt unutterably sad and lonely.

"When my mother dies," I said with a quiet melancholy, more effective perhaps than tears, "there will be no one in the world to love or care for me."

Mrs. Baskerville rose and seated herself again at my side, taking my passive hand in hers.

"My dear," she said, "there is one who would gladly, gladly love and cherish you all your life long, one whose love for you has never wavered from the first moment when he saw you. If you stand in need of love and protection, and would give him the right to guard and care for you, I do not think you would ever regret the step you had taken."

I knew exactly what she meant, and my heart

beat fast, but I looked at her with startled eyes, as if I had not understood.

"Dear Kate," said Mrs. Baskerville, pleadingly, "my son has never ceased to love you."

"Your son?

"Yes, my son Thomas. You know that he asked you to be his wife?"

"Yes—but that was two years ago."

"Two years—twenty years—it is all the same to Thomas. He does not love easily nor readily; but then, when he does, it is forever. He has never forgotten you. Your image is ever in his heart. If he does not marry you he will remain single all his life."

This was pleasant food for my vanity; but I hung my head and made no reply.

"Kate," continued Mrs. Baskerville, "the past two years have changed you much. You were a child then, now you are a woman. You have known suffering, and have tasted the bitterness of the world's heartlessness. Could you now, think you, learn to value a true heart at its worth? Could you now give my son a different answer, did he plead his cause again?"

I did not look up; I appeared covered with a maiden shame. In reality my eyes were dancing with amused satisfaction. Yet I had no idea that there was anything hypocritical in this. It seemed to me that I could not act otherwise.

"How can I tell?" I asked in a low voice.

"Could you tell if you were to see him?" asked Mrs. Baskerville.

"I—I—don't know—I suppose so. Oh! why are you asking all this?"

"Because, my dear, the happiness of my only son is at stake, and my mother's heart is often very sore for him. Because I know him well enough to feel assured that he would, with God's help, make you the very best and noblest of husbands."

"Oh, Mrs. Baskerville!" I cried, and buried my face in my hands.

"He would help you, my dear child, to tread that narrow path which leads to everlasting life—for my son, in his own quiet way, is an earnest Christian."

I made no reply: I was not sure that this was a great recommendation for my absent lover; yet I was so far softened of late that I felt an occasional yearning for more light and hope than I had ever yet experienced.

"My dear," questioned Mrs. Baskerville gently, "will you allow Thomas to write to you, and plead his cause himself?"

I caught at this suggestion. I thought I could more easily deal with a letter than with my lover in person, whose earnest, truthful eyes, brimful of honest love, might cause me to hesitate and falter in my vows of fidelity and affection.

"He may write—if he likes," I murmured indistinctly. "I will try to like him, Mrs. Baskerville —for your sake and for—for his own."

So I stood committed at last—practically, if not ostensibly—to an engagement with Mr. Thomas Baskerville; and the thought of another courtship was by no means distasteful to me.

When my lover's letter came it was like himself, manly, earnest, truthful, and very full of a deep and unfeigned love. There was not the polish of style that Henry Scrope had acquired, none of the exaggerated high-flown flattery that was then so much in vogue, and of which the gay soldier had been a master; but there was a ring of intense honesty and true devotion in every sentence that could not but stir some answering chord, even in my cold and self-seeking nature, and I felt that if I did not actually love Thomas Baskerville, at least I trusted and respected him.

I took the letter to my mother, and stood by her with downcast mien whilst she read it. Her pale face flushed with pleasure, and she looked up at me with eyes that shone with happiness.

"My darling child, is this so? Did you give him permission to write to you, as he says? Do you want my consent to your answer? Ah, you little know what joy it would be to me to see you the wife of that good man!"

I felt repaid by this for all qualms of con-

science. Surely it must be right to do what so greatly pleased my sweet mother.

"I am going to write a promise to be his wife, if you approve," I said in a low tone. "May I ask him to come here to see us?"

"Do so, indeed, my love; nothing could make me more truly happy."

So I wrote my letter with deliberate care, avoiding, with a keen sense of humiliating shame, those protestations and vows of changeless love of which I had once been so lavish, the very memory of which now made my cheek flame. It was a quiet, matter-of-fact letter, in which I told Mr. Thomas Baskerville that I would be his wife; but it was one that I felt would please him better than anything more impassioned.

And he himself came as its answer. We were prepared for this, and for his sudden appearance one lovely June evening.

I was in the garden, tending my roses, when I saw his tall figure striding towards me. We had agreed, his mother and I, that he might be expected any time now; but I think I felt a little startled and nervous as he approached.

He saw me in a moment, and advanced with rapid strides, and then paused, a few paces distant, and held out both his hands, looking at me with an expression that I can never forget.

"Kate," he said, in a voice that thrilled me as I

never expected to be thrilled by him; "Kate, can this be so?"

I came up slowly and put my hands in his.

"Kate," he said, "do you love me?"

"I am going to marry you," I answered, looking up for a moment and then dropping my eyes.

"Kate," he repeated, "do you love me?"

A curious sense of trepidation ran through me, like nothing I had ever experienced before. I knew that this man loved me with an intensity of love beyond anything I had ever before received, and yet I felt that he had the strength of will to repudiate this great love, and trample it under foot, rather than wed a woman whose heart he had not won. That must not, should not be! I was not going to offer myself again to one who would refuse the gift, however noble might be the motive. All this passed through my heart in a moment of time, and I steeled myself to play a part. I raised my eyes to his and answered softly:

"I love you, Thomas."

The next moment I was clasped to his breast, and my burning face was covered with his kisses. His was a nature too truthful to suspect. His great love drowned all other feelings in one of utter happiness. He did not pause to ask where and how I could have learned the love I professed to feel, seeing it was too years since we had met, and I had certainly not loved him then. No; such

doubts as these did not trouble him. I said I loved him, and that was enough.

Some writers give us to understand that a false word or a deceitful action brings to the author thereof an immediate sense of shame and misery that destroys happiness from that time forward. But this cannot be true of all natures, for I was certainly more happy than I had been for many months, during the days and the weeks that followed my engagement to Mr. Baskerville.

My mother was so beautifully tranquil and content that I could not regret the step I had taken. My lover was so unostentatiously devoted, and his love was so true, that I could not but like him increasingly with each passing day. Our wills never came into collision. He was our guest. My word was law, and my power over him, as I believed, was boundless.

Our marriage was arranged to take place early the following year, and Lydgate was to be our home during my mother's lifetime. This was my express stipulation, and nobody gainsaid it. Sometimes a sort of shadow would fall upon my mother's face as we discussed the future, and she would say with a gentle sigh:

"Ah, those will be happy days for those who will live to see them!"

I knew what she meant, and that she was anxious to prepare my mind for the truth; but I resolutely

declined to understand her hints. My own feelings underwent many fluctuations, and sometimes I persuaded myself that she might live many years yet.

Once I hinted as much to Tom, as I was learning now to call him; but he gravely shook his head.

"I fear not, Kate; I fear she is slowly sinking. I sometimes wonder if she will live to see our wedding-day, next year."

"Oh, Tom, it cannot be so near as that. It would be too awful! too dreadful!"

He looked sympathetic and yet grave as he answered:

"It hardly seems to me that such words as "awful" and "dreadful" are applicable to the death of a good woman."

I shuddered apprehensively. "Death is the most awful thing in the whole world—you know it is."

"No, indeed, I do not."

I stared at him in half-indignant surprise.

"What is then?"

"Sin," he answered quietly; "it is sin that gives the sting to death, and victory to the grave; but we know Who has taken both away."

I did not know, and could not refrain from asking:

"What do you mean?"

I saw that the question surprised him; but his answer was gentle enough.

"Christ conquered sin, once for all, when He died

for our sakes. We have not to fight the battle in our own strength now. That is done for us. Now honest repentance and simple faith are enough," and half unconsciously he quoted under his breath words which struck unfamiliarly upon my ear:

> "Who captive led captivity,
> Who robbed the grave of victory,
> And took the sting from death."

"I cannot think how people can be so callous and unkind!" I cried with a sort of sob, for there was something in Thomas Baskerville's words and looks which roused within me an aching consciousness of a great void that I had never tried to fill. "They do nothing but tell me that my mother is going to die; and I can't bear to think of it!"

And I fled from my lover, and shut myself up in my room, to wonder why that grisly phantom death had no terrors for anyone but me.

But the problem was beyond my powers of solution, and I left it unresolved.

CHAPTER IX.

KING OR QUEEN?

MY mother died in the January of the year 1820, and my marriage was postponed for three months, and took place on the first of May. It was a very quiet ceremony, very unlike the grand spectacle I had often amused myself by planning; but change and death had subdued my spirits for a time, and I was content to follow the counsels of those about me, and submit to whatever arrangements they should propose.

My mother's lingering illness, followed by her death, had made a deep, though, as it proved, not a lasting impression on me, and I made many resolves to be more thoughtful and "religious" in the future.

My resolutions, however, sincere as they were when I formed them, were made entirely in my own

strength. I did not ask help or counsel of God, because as yet He was but a name to me. I still felt quite strong enough to work out my own life according to my own ideas, and I mistook the feelings of gentleness and devotion which haunted me as I watched beside my mother's sick bed for a real and lasting change in my character. As I read the Bible promises, and repeated the prayers that my mother loved to hear, I *felt good*, if you can understand what I mean; so good that I was quite convinced of some great change in myself. I felt like a gentle sister of mercy, as I moved about the sick room, ministering to my mother's wants, and her tender words of loving thanks, and her anxiety lest my ceaseless devotion should wear me out, increased the melancholy self-satisfaction in which I was unconsciously indulging.

My old idol, self, still held its place in my heart, and occupied all my thoughts. I think, when my mother actually lay dead before me, I lost all sense of self for a brief period of intense grief; but I had not learned the lesson of humility yet. The idol was shaken for a moment, but alas! it did not fall.

I declined to leave Lydgate, although the Baskervilles were eager and anxious for me to spend with them the months that elapsed between my mother's death and my own marriage; but I was resolute, and so my future mother-in-law spent a

good deal of time with me, and Thomas paid us visits from time to time.

I do not think I liked the Baskervilles any the more for seeing so much of them. I grew very tired of the mother, and was inclined to resent the tone she adopted toward me, which was one of parental fondness, not unmixed with the suggestion of authority. As for the son, I could not but like and respect him; but I was not at ease with him, for I felt that his nature was far deeper than mine, and that he rated me much more highly than I deserved. I knew that his eyes must some day be opened, and that then I should appear like a hypocrite and deceiver.

Nevertheless we were duly married, for I had no energy or spirit now to fight against fate, and I had no wish to remain in solitary state at Lydgate. I married without any real love, and gave not one thought to the injury I was inflicting on my husband in so doing. I only thought of myself, and considered that I was bestowing an incalculable boon upon him in giving myself to him at all.

I was married in my riding habit, and we rode away from the church doors without any further ceremony. As long as I could not be surrounded with the regal pomp I had once planned, nothing could be too simple, and weddings in those days were, for the most part, quiet affairs enough.

We spent the next few weeks in what seemed

to me, after my long seclusion, a very gay fashion. We rode to Winchester, by easy stages, and after that we posted up to London. My husband knew that I had never before seen the great capital of the country, and he had taken a house there for six weeks, in order that I might indulge my natural taste for gayety, and that my ideas might be turned into a new channel.

I had certainly preyed upon myself too much of late, and some such step as this was almost necessary for the better establishment of my health. I was touched with this token of my husband's thoughtfulness, and I began to think that my marriage would be quite as happy as one need expect.

I had liked the riding and driving through new country, and, in spite of my mourning garb, I was quite prepared to begin enjoying myself once more.

London sights and sounds enchanted me, and we spent many days in visiting those places which I most wished to see. My husband knew London well, and was able to obtain admission to many places not usually shown to sightseers, and I was as pleased and delighted as a child.

At this time all London was aflame with excitement over the wrongs and the cruel treatment received by Queen Caroline at the hands of her husband.

The title of queen had been denied her. The greatest excitement prevailed, and society was split up into two sections—the king's party and the queen's party—and tumults in the streets occurred almost daily.

Families have been divided and enmities stirred up by smaller causes than this; and thus it was that the first quarrel arose between my husband and me.

Those who have studied the history of that time know that it was the people who took up the queen's quarrel with such vehemence, stirred up by political leaders, who hoped by means of this lever to unseat the existing ministry, and to bring to a climax the unpopularity of the new king.

The higher classes sided with the sovereign, and looked coldly upon the queen, whose reputation was said to be sadly tarnished. That she was a sorely injured woman, few cool-headed persons could deny; but the loyalty of the upper classes made them stand by their king, even when he showed himself, as in this case, harsh and unjust.

Unfortunately for me, however, we did not go into society, having very few friends in town. I had no chance of observing the attitude taken up by the majority of people in our own rank in life, and only heard the inflated accounts brought by my maid, or read the wild and exaggerated language of the papers she procured for me.

My natural tendency was towards what would be called in these days 'woman's rights,' and I had a great idea of the homage due to woman. I secretly hoped that the king would be deposed, and the injured queen raised to the throne, and no idea was too wild to find an echo in my heart.

My husband, for a time, knew very little of this state of ferment into which I was being driven. He had a good deal of business to transact, in reference to some sale of property which he was effecting, and a sort of instinct held me silent in his presence, for I felt certain that he would not approve the red-hot heat into which I was working myself.

A climax came, however, on the sixth of June, when the injured queen, having landed at Dover, despite all the king's commands, entered London, accompanied by Alderman Wood and Lady Ann Hamilton. Lord Eldon had said, when he heard of her intention, "Our queen threatens to come to England; if she ventures to do so, she is the most courageous woman I have ever heard of. The evil she may do in coming will be infinite. At first she will have an immense popularity with the multitude, but I give her only a few weeks, or at most a few months, to be ruined in the opinion of the whole world."

I had read those words in the paper my husband

took in, and I had laughed within myself at the sagacious old man who had dared to utter them. At twenty, the sound foresight of an old statesman has very little weight compared with the wild, extravagant clamor of the masses.

My maid was a London woman thirty years of age, and she, in common with the majority of her class, was intensely excited by the thought of the coming struggle. It was at her suggestion, but in accordance with my own earnest wish, that we resolved to join the procession that was to welcome the injured queen to the capital.

I shall never forget that day, nor the awful sights and sounds which haunted me for days and nights afterwards.

It must be remembered that I was a simple country girl, brought up in a sort of "aristocratic seclusion" hardly possible in these days, and my only idea of a crowd was formed from a gathering of tenantry and quiet country folk at some of the houses of the large landowners near to our home.

My maid, with more zeal than discretion, took me into the very heart of the crowd. We had decided that we should see more on foot than in any kind of conveyance, and before I fairly knew where we were going, or what we were going to do, I found myself hemmed in the midst of a shouting, raving mob of people, who looked to me more like savages than human beings; and, as the crowd grew

denser, we were pressed closer and more close together till it seemed as if we must be suffocated.

I grew half wild with terror. I could not move, save with the imperceptible motion of the crowd; I could hardly breathe; I was sick with the stench which exhaled from the vast multitude of unwashed people around me. I felt the pressure increasing gradually, and I knew not what awful thing might happen next. What did it matter to me that we were following the carriage of the queen? I could not see it, nor should I have cared to do so if I could. Wild, personal terror had me in its clutch. I felt I would give all I possessed to be able to escape from that awful crowd, which was crushing the very life out of me.

"Martha!" I cried with the fierce energy of despair, "if you don't get me out of this I shall die!"

"We can't help ourselves now," answered the maid, who was rather alarmed herself at my looks. "When the street widens out, as it does farther on, maybe we'll be able to do something."

"But we're not moving at all!" I cried frantically. "I shall die—I shall faint—if you don't take me away!"

I suppose I looked as if I should, for the woman was frightened.

"Don't faint, ma'am. If you do, you'll be trodden under foot and crushed to death. I'll get you

out as soon as I can—indeed I will. We are moving slowly. There will be more space soon."

I do not know how long that awful crush continued, but the pressure did relax somewhat at last. It seemed as if we reached a more open space, for the crowd divided hither and thither, and others beside ourselves seemed anxious to escape. There was a pushing, shouting, scrambling, and hurrying like nothing I had ever experienced before, and then a sort of wave seemed to rush at me, carrying me almost off my feet; and when I recovered my breath and my senses, I was alone amid a sea of strange faces, and Martha nowhere in sight.

Common sense told me it was useless to hunt for her; but I did not know where I was, and I was terrified, beyond all power of expression, lest I should be engulfed again in that awful crowd from the pressure of which I had now escaped. My dress was torn, my cloak had gone, my bonnet was crushed, and my purse and all I had in my pocket had vanished.

Rough men and ragged women looked curiously at me, as I hastened on, trembling and panting, in what direction I did not know; and I cannot tell what would have become of me if I had not found an unoccupied coach, and made the driver understand where I lived.

We had left the house early in the day, and it

was evening before I returned. I had tasted no food all those hours, and I was exhausted almost beyond power of speech.

Martha had reached home before me, and both she and my husband came rushing out and assisted me into the house. Faint and exhausted as I was, I could still note how dark and severe were the lines of his face, how stern was the voice in which he ordered the frightened maid to put her mistress to bed, and give her soup without a moment's loss of time.

I knew full well that I had done wrong, and for a short time I was deeply penitent; but it is wonderful what a restoring power food and rest will produce. By the time that I had partaken of refreshment, and had slept off the first effects of my exhaustion, I felt quite prepared to stand up for the course I had taken, and defend it to my husband, if I could not do so to myself.

"Your husband is so angry," said the trembling Martha, "I never saw him so angry before. He says he shall never trust me again, and that I must go."

"You shall not go, Martha," I answered firmly; "I will not allow anyone to dismiss my servants but myself."

I stopped suddenly short as I spoke these words, for my husband had just entered the room. Martha beat a hasty retreat, and Thomas said to me:

"If we are to differ in opinion, Kate, it would be more dignified if you refrained from discussing such points with the servants."

I knew I had done wrong, but I was not in the mood to confess it. I merely shrugged my shoulders and stifled a yawn.

I will not give in detail the conversation that followed. My husband was throughout very kind and very just in all he said, and only really reproached me with concealing from him my warm zeal in the queen's cause, and my intention to join the procession which had followed her that day.

He explained the whole case to me, with a clearness and impartiality utterly unlike anything I had heard before; not for a moment denying that the queen was a deeply injured woman, yet clearly pointing out that this stirring up of the popular fury was not really done on behalf of the unhappy princess, but merely in hopes of gaining a party end.

"You see, Kate, we are so clearly told that our duty is to honor the king, and submit ourselves to the powers that be, that we cannot rashly and lightly disobey such a mandate. The dignity of silence and submission would better have become our unfortunate queen than the course she has been advised to take; and I fear that she will find out, ere long, that the warm reception she has received has no deeper root than a popular love of

excitement, and the fascination of a grievance and cause for discontent, and that it will subside as rapidly as it has risen. I fear that neither king nor queen have lived as their subjects could have wished; but we cannot deny them such loyalty as is their due, and to our hereditary sovereign our first duty must be given."

I listened in sullen silence.

"Of course, men always side with men against women," was all my answer; and then, lashing myself up into sudden anger, I drew my husband into something as like a quarrel as was possible, where there were injustice and fury on one side, and gentle forbearance, combined with inflexible firmness, on the other.

He left me at last, when he considered he had heard enough, and I lay fretting and fuming and working myself up into a white heat of passion, which I tried hard to keep glowing; for I knew that if I let it cool, I should be obliged to see that I had been in the wrong.

In an hour's time my husband returned.

"My dear," he said quietly, "you said just now that you hated London, and wished you had never come. Would you like to leave it as soon as I can arrange it, and go home?"

"Yes," I answered shortly, "to Lydgate."

"No," was the quiet rejoinder, "to the Mount.

That is your home now. I will make the necessary arrangements at once."

"He means to be king, and rule," said I bitterly, when I found myself alone; "but if he thinks I will play the part of the injured queen, he is very much mistaken!"

The week following found us settled at my husband's house in Berkshire—a fine place called the Mount, which I had heard of often, but had never seen. It was utterly unlike Lydgate. It had none of the mediæval beauty and hoary antiquity of my dear old home. It was, from the outside, an ugly pile of buildings, square, and flat, and tasteless, like most of the large houses built in the times of the Georges. I was loud in my condemnation of its hideous appearance, but I could not deny that within it was exceedingly spacious and commodious.

I was not happy in my new home. I had begun my married life in a wrong spirit; and, as we all know, a thing badly begun is not quickly or easily mended.

Mrs. Baskerville had retired to the "Dower House" on her son's marriage; but it was only half a mile away, and she was a constant visitor at the Mount. She was very kind and tried to be my friend; but I was not inclined to meet her advances. I resented her advice, of which I often stood in need, and believed, as many other foolish young wives do believe, that all my faults and

failings and shortcomings were discussed between my husband and his mother.

We went a good deal into society at this time, and there was plenty of gayety all round us.

I threw myself heart and soul into every amusement that came in my way, and developed a levity of speech and action that I had never indulged even in my wildest days of girlish freedom.

I knew quite well that my husband was pained and disappointed in me. His love never wavered once; but I knew that his judgment was not blinded, and I resented the faintest suspicion of reproach.

The miserable quarrel between king and queen, and the revolting inquiry that was instituted into her past life, kept up the fire of my wrath, and served me for a pretext for my coldness towards my husband; but in reality, once removed from the excitement of town life, my ardor rapidly cooled, and I began to take the view of the proceeding adopted by the majority of the people of my own class.

Save for the pleasure of taunting my husband with his love of tyranny and injustice towards a helpless woman, I cared little more about the cause of the hapless queen. I was triumphant for a moment at the result of the trial; indignant and wrathful when the story of the coronation was told; and I shed a few tears at the news of her

death, only a fortnight later. But my heart was no longer really concerned in the matter; and that luckless episode merely served to widen the breach that I had resolutely placed between my husband and myself.

There was no real or visible estrangement between us, you must understand. We lived as quietly, and apparently as happily, as the majority of married people. Often I was quite gay and bright for weeks together, and made many good resolutions for the better regulation of my conduct. I was fond of my husband, too, although I still denied him the love I should have freely given—the love he so richly deserved. Many times in those days I was on the verge of making him my truest friend, and asking his help along the path which he was treading, and which I had missed. But somehow my courage or my resolution always failed, and I went on in my old way. I think I was dimly conscious that if I took up in earnest a religious life, I must also give up a good deal that I liked to do and to think.

I knew that my giddy pursuit of pleasure, to the exclusion of all else, was not in accordance with a truly Christian life. I knew that my pride, my self-will, my hasty temper, and my neglect of home duties were all in direct defiance of the simple but definite rules laid down for those who wished to follow the footsteps of their crucified Saviour. I

knew that the example He had left for us to copy was one which I was not at all prepared to imitate.

So I put off, till a more convenient season, all such serious thoughts, and tried to lose myself in the enjoyments of the present.

I cannot say that this attempt was very successful. There were moments when the shallowness of my pleasures and the hollowness of my life struck me very painfully, but I was resolved to drown conscience and to continue in my own way.

I prided myself on never doing things by halves. I liked to be thorough in whatever I took up; and, as I was not prepared to take up the life of a sincere Christian with any thoroughness, I thought it was better to let the matter quite alone.

The birth of my eldest son, Thomas, was not to me the turning-point it is to many mothers. I did not like babies, and I felt no special interest in mine. I was fond of him when he was good, but I could not endure him when he was fretful or cross; and I saw as little of him as I could do, with any sort of regard for appearances.

My husband, however, was devoted to the child, and I grew almost tired of hearing his praises sung. I was half jealous of the boy who had won such a depth of love; and although my husband was increasingly tender and loving towards me, I

could not rid myself of the idea that our first-born son had come between us.

So days and weeks and months passed on, bringing me no nearer to God, nor even to the husband and son whom He had given me.

I was living to this world, and this world only, and yet I wondered, with a fretful, irritated sense of injury, why it was that I was not happy.

CHAPTER X.

MY SECOND SON.

I AM now going to make a break in my story, and take it up a good deal later, when my eldest son, Tom, was twelve years old.

I had five children at that time—Lovel, who was little more than a year younger than his eldest brother; Harold, who was nine; Ursula, eight; and Arthur, nearly six.

Other changes besides the birth of children had passed over our household. Mrs. Baskerville had died shortly after the birth of my only girl, and my husband had deeply mourned her loss. I had grown to look to her for help in the management of my young children, and I missed her more than I should have thought possible.

I had also lost my only relatives, General and Mrs. Otway, and of Geraldine I had seen nothing since her marriage.

I do not think my character had changed very materially during the past years. I was still very proud and self-willed, and by no means a tender or a loving wife. I had a strong respect and affection for my husband, and I leaned upon him more than I knew; but he did not satisfy my imagination. I was inclined to look down upon him with a sense —and what a mistaken sense!—of being a good deal his superior; and I was sometimes guilty of that most grave of all offences, of allowing my children to see that I was not always at one with him in matters of discipline and management.

I was guilty, too, of other great indiscretions in the management of my children. I allowed myself to have a favorite, and to show that he was my favorite.

I do not think it was merely the blind pride of motherhood that made me regard my second son, Lovel, as so peculiarly handsome and winning a boy. I do not think I was naturally specially fond of my own children—certainly not during the earlier years of my married life; but I did love that second boy far, far more than any of his brothers.

For one thing he was born at Lydgate, and then, from his infancy upwards, he was "every inch a Lovel."

Thomas, the eldest son, was a true Baskerville, and in face as well as disposition the resemblance to his father was so close as to be almost grotesque.

He was a very steady and good boy, but inclined to be heavy and dull; and I felt a perpetual sense of irritation at his little awkwardnesses, and his silent, bashful ways. I believe it was his great love and admiration for me that caused him to be peculiarly clumsy in my presence, for he did love me almost to adoration, and was quite aware that I regarded his blunders with scant patience; but all this I did not learn till long afterwards. I thought the boy's love was all lavished on his father, and was jealous of the deep sympathy and affection existing between father and son.

But Lovel was in every sense of the word my own boy. He was tall, graceful, high-spirited, and in every way delightful. He knew as well as possible that I was as wax in his hands, and that I could deny him nothing. He knew that the beautiful old Lydgate, which we both so dearly loved, was willed to descend to him some day; and, whenever he stayed there, he played the lord and master in a way that delighted me, but which gave my husband some annoyance.

"My dear," he said one day—when he spoke to me in this fashion it was always with great gentleness—" do you think you are wise in encouraging that boy to speak and think in such a strain? Do you not think it best that, as children, they should think as little as possible about the wealth, and importance that may be theirs later? Thomas if

be lives, will inherit my landed property; but I should be very sorry to hear him boast about it, and plan what he would do in such a case, as Lovel does with reference to Lydgate."

I laughed rather satirically.

"You might as well compare a young thoroughbred and a cow, as Thomas and Lovel. When a boy is brimful of ambition and life and imagination, how can you expect him to plod on as steadily and stolidly as one whose thoughts never rise above the level of a ploughboy's?"

My husband looked grave.

"You are never quite just to Tom," he said. "If you did not quench him so by your sarcasm, but encouraged him to talk, you would not find him so much behind your brilliant Lovel as you think; but let that pass. What I would say is, that it is just because Lovel has such ambition and imagination, that I do not think you should try to give food to these somewhat dangerous qualities. So long as boyhood lasts I should be inclined to pour cold water upon the flame rather than give it fuel."

But I would not be advised.

"You can do what you please with Tom," I answered. "I never interfere about him; but I mean to manage Lovel my own way. We will see which turns out the greater man."

My husband sighed; but he knew by experience

that argument produced little effect upon me. I could generally score a seeming victory with my tongue, even when I felt defeated in reality.

I was very blind in those days and very foolish; but the time of awakening was not far off.

All these years I had remained perfectly careless and indifferent to real and personal religion. I conformed outwardly with great zeal to all the ordinances of the Church, and brought up my children to do the same. I read a chapter of the Bible to them each Sunday, and gave them the *Pilgrim's Progress* and such other religious books then published as were suited to their capacity. And, having done this, I considered that I had done all that was necessary for them or myself, and I confess that I felt really uncomfortable when my little Ursula used to look up at me with trusting brown eyes, and ask me strange and searching questions that had never troubled me seriously all through my life.

Thomas gave all his confidence to his father, and Lovel never seemed to think of anything beyond the present life; but little Ursula was one of those grave, earnest children, who seem from infancy upwards inclined to soar into the regions of speculative thought, and who request explanations of all sorts of mysteries beyond the power of man to disclose.

I was continually forced to silence the child by

telling her that she was too young to understand such things, that nobody could understand them, and that she had better play with her doll, and not trouble about what was so far beyond her; and yet I often felt that this was not really the way in which to meet the child's inquiries, and that I ought to be able to give answers to many of the questions that troubled her.

Ursula often brought her Bible to me, begging to have certain passages explained. She was very fond of her Bible, and studied it so closely that I often felt half annoyed by her absorption. I quite dreaded to see her come to me with the open book in her hand, and her dark eyes full of earnest questioning thought.

The prophets and the Revelation seemed her favorite reading, and the difficult passages brought to me for elucidation were often quite beyond my powers. I had never studied the Word of God myself, and I was more ignorant than many a school child of the present day of the real meaning of the sacred words. I was quite aware that my explanations were trivial and unsatisfactory in the extreme, and I was in daily fear that my little daughter would soon find this out. As it was I could see that she often went away dissatisfied; but so far she believed it was her want of comprehension, not my want of knowledge, that made the difficulty.

I could not, however, help wondering sometimes how long this stage of confusion would last.

As I have said, my soul had been sleeping for very long—almost all my life, indeed—but the day of awakening was at hand.

We always spent three or four of the summer months at Lydgate. My children delighted in the quaint old house and the liberty they always enjoyed whilst there; and Lovel's birthday, which was on June 1, was always kept as a very grand festival—far more so than that of poor Tom, which occurred in April, and was always passed at the Mount.

Lovel, in the year in which I write, was nearly eleven, and his birthday was to be kept in the usual style. He had set his mind, for many months, on a certain gray colt which had been growing up at Lydgate, and I had promised him that it should be his when it was old enough to be broken.

It was now three years old, and a little to spare, and had been partially broken, and was improving every day. It was a pretty creature, standing over fourteen hands already, and was safe to grow an inch or more. It was very well bred and full of mettle. Lovel was filled with delighted pride, and eager to be allowed to mount his new possession.

He had all the courage and reckless spirit that I still possessed, and knew not the meaning of fear.

The young horse passed into his own possession upon his birthday; but it was not yet sufficiently broken to be considered safe. One day I mounted and rode him, for I was still a fearless horsewoman, and I allowed Lovel to do the same after me; but the horse recognized at once the inexperienced hand, and, although Lovel stuck to him manfully and did not give in, I could see that the boy was hardly a match for him yet.

My husband happened to come by at that moment, and peremptorily ordered Lovel to dismount. The boy obeyed with reluctance; and I felt a little annoyed at the tone employed to him, considering that I was standing by, and giving my countenance to what was done.

"That horse is not fit for you to ride," said the lad's father. "He is not broken yet."

"Oh, yes, he is!" I answered quickly. "I have tried him myself. He only wants riding a little more to be quite quiet."

My husband never contradicted me before the children, whatever I might say.

"Then one of the grooms shall ride it," he answered quietly. "There is no reason why any risk should be run for the sake of a little want of patience. Now, Lovel," he added, turning to the boy and speaking gravely and kindly, "you are not to mount your horse again till I give you leave. I will see that its education is completed as quickly

as possible; but, until you have my permission, I forbid you to ride it any more."

Lovel made no reply. He was never sullen, but he was very determined, and it was a great effort to give up his own way. His father did not, however, press for an answer, but turned away, considering the matter at an end.

"What a shame!" ejaculated Lovel under his breath, as soon as his father was safely out of earshot. "What a shame!"

I did not reprove the boy for his undutiful words. I felt a good deal annoyed myself.

"Never mind, Lovel," I said consolingly; "the horse will soon be broken. In a very few days it will be quite safe for you to ride him."

"It's safe enough now," answered the lad; only father is so——"

"We will go and speak to the groom ourselves, and tell him to give him lots of exercise and not too much corn. That will quiet him down better than anything."

We did this; but Lovel still continued to speak of his father angrily and disrespectfully, and I did not check him, save in a very half-hearted way.

A fortnight passed, and still the permission was withheld. Lovel waxed furious, and I felt much annoyed. I allowed myself to think that this veto was laid upon the riding because Tom was but a sorry horseman, and had not the least ambition

to have a pony to ride. I said to myself that my husband was annoyed at Lovel's superior skill and daring, and I was as much vexed as the boy by this long period of enforced waiting.

I considered myself a better judge of horses than my husband, and I was much annoyed at his determined assertion that the young horse would not break, and was quite unfit for a boy to ride. It seemed to me that he was trying to rob Lovel of any practical good from the pleasure he ought and expected to have from my birthday present.

"Mother! mother!" cried Lovel, bursting into my room one morning, as I was giving Ursula a lesson in music. "Oh, darling mother, *do* say I may ride my horse to-day! Father has taken Tom to the town, so I can't ask him, and George Trefusis has come over on his pony to beg me to ride with him, to see some puppies a farmer has got. He says if I'll come with him he'll give me a pup. Oh, do *please* let me go! Indeed the horse is quite safe. I've watched the groom ride him ever so many times, and he never does anything naughty. I do so want to go. Please say I may!'

This, and a great deal more to the same effect, accompanied by caresses and endearing words, and every art of persuasion, of which Lovel was an adept, won the day. I did not myself believe that the horse was unsafe. I was confident that Lovel's

courage and skill were sufficient to master a high spirit; and I was not displeased at the thought of proving to my husband that I had been right, and he wrong, in judgment of the creature.

"Very well, Lovel," I answered at last, "I will give you leave to go."

I went down to watch the start. The pretty young thing looked gentle enough, though evidently full of life and spirit. I questioned the groom, who considered him "right enough; only fresh when his head was turned homewards. He wanted holding well in hand then."

I cautioned Lovel, and watched him ride away without one misgiving. Then I went back to the music lesson.

But Ursula had grown weary of my absence; she had left the instrument and had gone back to her Bible.

"Mother," she said, as I sat down in my accustomed chair, "in the Bible it always talks as if our fathers and mothers were the same. It says, 'Children, obey your parents,' and it says, 'Honor your father and your mother.' Don't you think it would be much easier if it said, 'Honor your father *or* your mother,' and 'Children obey one of your parents?' Then it would be all easy; but I don't see how we can obey both parents, when they say different things." And she looked

up at me with her dark eyes full of questioning thought.

"You must come and finish your lesson now," I answered hastily. "I do wish, Ursula you would be a little more like other children."

The child looked rebuked and humbled, and tried to make up for her defects by unusual diligence; but I could not get her simple words out of my mind, nor rid myself of the impression they had made upon me.

"Children, obey one of your parents.

Was that the order of our household?

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

I DO not know how long a time had passed; but I imagine it was some two hours later that Harold came bursting into my room, his face aflame with excitement.

"Mother! Mother!" he cried, "*isn't* it funny? There is Lovel's gray horse galloping about in the field all alone, with his saddle and bridle on. I saw him come tearing down the road through the park, and I was frightened that he'd run over me; but he just jumped over the hedge into the field, and he's racing about there. He does look so pretty! Do come and see him. I want to fetch Lovel to see him, too."

Before the words were out of the child's mouth, I had started up in wild fear and was rushing downstairs. The alarm had begun to spread through the house, for the stableman had seen

the riderless horse, and I met the groom, his face as white as ashes, coming in search of me.

How shall I describe the awful moments of suspense that followed? The carriage was prepared with a celerity never equalled in my stable, and we were driving fast and furiously along the road towards the farm Lovel had started to visit, almost before I had grasped what it was that had happened. The groom sat on the box by the coachman, neither having had time to don his livery. The children's nurse sat beside me in the carriage. Surely so odd-looking an equipage had never before left the precincts of Lydgate.

On and on dashed the horses. I had bid the man drive as for dear life, and he obeyed me to the letter. We had, perhaps, traversed two miles of the road, when the carriage came to a sudden stop, and the groom bounded to the ground.

My heart seemed to stand still.

"Open the door," I gasped faintly; "they have found him at last."

The servant opened the door, and I stepped out, holding to her arm, for I was too dazed to stand alone.

I looked round, and the sight that met my gaze steadied my nerves in a moment.

Lovel — my best-loved child — lay stretched motionless upon the hard road, and the man was kneeling beside him, with his hand upon his heart.

I approached, and asked with the calmness born of intensity of feeling:

"Is he dead?"

It seemed an eternity before the answer came.

"I don't think so, ma'am. I think his heart beats—a little."

I stooped over the boy and touched him. He was white and cold and senseless. His sunny hair was clotted with the blood that oozed from an ugly wound on the side of his head. One of his arms was doubled under him in a manner which plainly showed it to be broken.

My heart for a moment failed me utterly. I had no hope that my son would be given back to me.

"Lift him into the carriage," I said faintly. "Be as gentle as you can. We must get him home as quickly as possible. Oh, Lovel! Lovel! My son, my son!" these last words were only murmured to myself.

My orders were obeyed; and we were quickly at home. The doctor was there almost at once, for I had despatched a messenger to him before we had started on our expedition.

I could not read the expression of his face as he looked at the boy, and forced a little stimulant between the clenched teeth; but my own heart told me that there was no hope.

We laid him in his own little bed. Lovel's room

was conveniently situated, and opened, on either side, into the apartments occupied by his brothers. One of these rooms I took for my own use, and allotted the other to the children's nurse—a faithful and trustworthy woman, who had long served the Baskerville family.

When Dr. Hornbury came out of Lovel's room I addressed him with some imperiousness of tone.

"Tell me the truth. Is there, or is there not, a faint spark of hope?"

He looked at me from under his shaggy eyebrows, and helped himself to a pinch of snuff. He had known me all my life, and always treated me with a sort of paternal familiarity

"My dear young lady—I mean, my dear madam—you know that whilst there is life there is hope; but I will not disguise from you the fact that the case is a very serious one."

"You think he will die?"

"I decline, so far, to pronounce a decided opinion. Whilst this state of unconsciousness lasts, it is impossible to make an exhaustive diagnosis."

"You think he will recover his senses?"

"I think it possible. It would be a favorable sign; but I fear the spine may have suffered. He was lying on his back when you found him, you say?"

"Yes."

"A fall from a horse, eh?"

I shivered slightly.

"Yes."

"Was he alone?"

"He did not start alone; but I suppose he and his friend had parted company on the homeward road, as their way did not lie entirely in the same direction. I did not think of that when I let him go."

I suppose my face must have expressed more self-reproach than the words, for the old man answered:

"Tut! tut! my dear; you must not take things to heart like that. My own experience is that horses go more quietly alone than in company; and if a horse swerves and throws his rider, no companion can be of any help in averting the catastrophe."

But Dr. Hornbury was far from understanding the deeper grief that lay below. That grief could only be known to the heart upon which it lay like a leaden weight. He went away promising to return later in the day, and I went back to the sick room.

I found little Ursula sitting curled up at the bed's foot, watching Lovel's unconscious face with her peculiarly earnest eyes.

Those two children, so very different in disposition, had always been deeply attached, and the boy had always much preferred to have his sister for his

companion than any of his brothers. Thus I was not surprised that Ursula had found her way into the room; but I was much surprised at her composure, for I should have expected that the sight of the bandaged head, and the arm in splints, would have frightened her into an agony of grief and terror. But it did not seem as if she had shed one tear.

"Mother," said the child, looking up at me, "is Lovel going to die?"

The question so quietly asked gave me a curious shock. I answered almost harshly:

"How can you ask anything so dreadful about your brother?"

"Is it dreadful?" asked Ursula wonderingly. "I thought dying was only going to Jesus."

I did not know how to answer. Dying to me meant the valley of the shadow, leading to unknown realms of darkness. Heaven was a name familiar enough, but it conveyed no real meaning to my mind.

"I wish it could be me instead of Lovel," continued Ursula wistfully. "He is so strong and brave, and he does not want to die yet; but I should like to go to Jesus, and live with the beautiful angels."

I was too overwrought to listen calmly to words like these. I answered sharply:

"You must not make a noise here, or you will

have to go. I can't have Lovel disturbed; and you do not know what you are talking about."

"It is all in the Bible," Ursula answered softly, "I can find most of the places."

She had her little book with her, and began reading, whispering the words to herself. She did not talk any more, but gazed at Lovel, from time to time, as if she were distressed and perplexed by his strange irresponsiveness

I have no idea of the flight of time that day. I know that food was brought to me, that Ursula was carried off to her dinner; that she crept back by-and-by to her old place, and that the time drew near for the return of my husband; yet it seemed to me as if years, not hours, had passed since my boy had come to me, in all the glow of health and beauty, and had asked leave to ride the forbidden horse.

The sound of wheels through the open window at last announced a return. Lovel had not stirred nor shown the least sound of life all this time. I whispered to Ursula

"Don't leave him whilst I am away."

And then I prepared to go down and tell my husband the whole story.

But ill news travels fast. Thomas had heard rumors of disaster whilst ten miles from home, and at the lodge he had heard enough to confirm his worst fears.

He met me with an earnest look, and a question uttered tremblingly:

"Am I in time?"

"He still lives, but he knows no one."

"Is there hope?"

"They do not say there is not, but I have none."

He looked tenderly at me, and took my hand within his arm as we went onwards together.

"How?" he asked. "That young horse?"

I bent my head.

"Ah!" he said, and heaved a deep sigh. "Disobedience—disobedience—the first sin, and the commonest."

I commanded myself, and answered steadily:

"It was not disobedience. I gave him leave to ride the horse to-day."

My husband made no answer in words, but he drew me more closely to himself, for I was trembling like an aspen. I had expected his hold to relax when I had made this confession, and I was deeply touched by this unconscious testimony of his love.

In the course of a few hours Lovel recovered consciousness, but remained for some days in a heavy, dazed state, unable to talk or to think consecutively, and we had little or no hope of his ultimate recovery. During that time Ursula often sat for hours together in the room. I had left her there alone for a few minutes on one occasion, and

on returning with my husband, as we passed over the threshold, he paused and whispered, "Hush! what are they saying?"

We could see into the room ourselves, but its occupants could not see us, for Ursula was standing at the bedside, with her back towards us, and she concealed our proximity from the sick boy.

But we heard distinctly the softly spoken dialogue:—

"Jesus will forgive you, if you ask Him, Lovel, and that is better even than father. You know father would forgive you, if he were here; and Jesus loves you better than father can."

"How do you know?"

"Because He died for us—for you, Lovel, and for everybody. He must love us all, to do that. You love Him, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. I've loved him ever since we began reading together; but I wish I had been better. I did so many wrong things. I oughtn't to have coaxed mother to let me ride Comet that morning."

"Don't talk so much," advised the prudent Ursula, "and don't fret. Jesus will forgive all your sins if you ask Him. He will make you whiter than snow—the Bible says so."

"I don't deserve it," said the boy remorsefully.

"But Jesus loves us," answered the little girl. "He died to take away all sin—your sin, because

you rode the gray horse, and everything else you've done, and everything everybody's done."

"You're quite sure?"

"Oh, yes! It says so in the Bible."

"Ursula, am I going to die?" asked the boy suddenly.

We were just going to move forward then, but I clutched my husband's arm, and made him pause, I felt as if I *could* not face my boy with that question on his lips.

"I don't quite know," answered little Ursula. "I don't think anybody quite knows. You wouldn't *much* mind dying, would you, Lovel dear? It must be so nice to go away with a beautiful angel, and live with Jesus always. You wouldn't be afraid to go, would you?"

"No, I don't think I should be afraid; but I didn't want to die yet," said the boy regretfully. "There are so many things I wanted to do first."

"I wish it could be me instead," said Ursula. "I should like to go to live up there; and if I did, I should ask God to let me help to take care of you. Perhaps, Lovel, you will find that you can still go on working and doing things *there*. I don't think we're ever meant to be lazy, and I don't think we could ever be quite happy without some kind of work to try and please God."

"Then I'll try not to mind it any more," answered the boy. "I'll think about Jesus, and how

He loves me, and then I'll not worry any more. I'll be brave if I can, as He was."

At that moment a sob of irrepressible anguish burst from me, and the children perceived that they were not alone. My husband went over to the bedside and bent over the boy, whilst I sank down in a chair in a tempest of grief.

I can hardly now analyze my feelings at that supreme moment; but I believe the keenest pang I then suffered was due to the revelation of depths in my boy's nature that I had never sounded—of thoughts and yearnings which had not been brought to me to be discussed, but had been taken where they were more certain of meeting sympathy —to the little sister whom he had loved so well.

Those who know most of children know well how utterly at variance sometimes the two sides of a character may appear; how a careless, high-spirited, wilful child, who seems to live only and entirely for the present, may yet possess a deep undercurrent of devotional feeling, apparently almost irreconcilable with the surface thoughts and actions; and how this deeper vein is sometimes undetected, even by those who know the child best, until something occurs to disturb the quiet flow of life, and sound the depths beneath.

So it had been with my Lovel. He had always appeared to me as careless, light-hearted, and spirited as I had been at his age. He certainly

had inherited my pride and daring and waywardness to a remarkable extent, and I never supposed that the resemblance ended with externals. I had no idea that the gay and happy boy, in whom I took such pride, had moments of earnest penitence and eager striving after higher things ; that he and his little sister read their Bible together from time to time, and had their own ideas about a future state and the love and duty they owed to God.

This sudden revelation seemed, as with a lightning flash, to reveal to me the state of my own heart, and its dreary desolation and darkness.

My boy, who had turned to his mother for help and sympathy in all else, had divined, with the unerring instinct of childhood, that on these matters he would come to her in vain.

I was roused from my wild outbreak of grief by the sound of a feeble voice.

"Mother," said Lovel, "don't cry so. You mustn't mind, because it was my fault, and father has forgiven me—and God has too, I'm sure."

As I wiped my tear-dimmed eyes, and gazed into the boy's face, an awful sense of fear swept across me. What had brought that strange, far-away look into those bright eyes? What was it my boy saw that was hidden from us?

I checked my tears, and I felt that my husband was supporting me.

"Is it?—is it?" I gasped.

"I believe it is," he answered; "he could not swallow a minute back. Do not trouble him by tears. He is fit to go."

Little Ursula was standing beside him, very calm and quiet and fearless.

"Is it very dark, Lovel?"

"No—not now."

"Did the angels come just now? Was it them you saw."

"I don't know what I saw. I think it must have been—Jesus." He paused, then asked faintly:

"Ursula—what was it?—that verse—I want it again——"

And clearly came the words from the unfaltering lips of childhood:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me: Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

There was a moment's pause, and then Lovel's own bright smile shone over his face.

"That is it—it is quite true—He *is* with me—Jesus."

He never spoke again—my bright, beautiful boy. He left us with a smile upon his lips, thinking so little of the dark journey that he hardly said farewell. As he had lived so he died—happy and brave and trusting.

I saw his eyes close; I watched the last breath drawn, and then a darkness fell upon me, and I remember no more.

CHAPTER XII.

AWAKENING.

I DID not know how long that strange sleep had lasted, when at length I opened my eyes to light and life once more.

I was in my own bed, and the sun was shining upon the drawn blind, and little Ursula, in a black frock and a black sash over her pinafore, was curled up in an armchair near to the bed, with a book upon her knee, over which her bright head was earnestly bent.

I awoke with that sense of oppression we all know so well, feeling that some great sorrow hung over me, which I could not yet recall. The change from white to black in my little girl's dress seemed to bring the dreaded presence nearer; but still I had not grasped the full sense of what it meant.

One name sprang as by instinct to my lips, and half unconsciously I gave it utterance:

"Lovel!"

My little girl raised her head quickly, and when she saw that my eyes were open, she came towards me and climbed upon the bed to kiss me.

"You are better, mother dear; you have awoke. I must go and tell somebody; they said so."

"Wait one moment," I answered, detaining the child. "Tell me—Lovel——"

She looked at me with a smile.

"Lovel is in heaven, mother. He went there a week ago!"

The little one's face looked almost unearthly in its strange, thoughtful brightness. It was as if she had been gazing into the great unseen world around us, until she had herself in some measure partaken of its mysterious life and joy. One cannot see an expression like that upon the face of a child without a curious pang.

I shrank from looking at her. There was something in the expression of the lovely little face strangely like that upon my boy's, just before he closed his eyes and went away—"with Jesus." I could not bear to see it, and I closed my eyes and asked:

"Have they buried him yet?"

"Yes," answered Ursula, "two days ago. But, mother, you must not mind. It is not Lovel they buried. Lovel is in heaven.

I made no answer, and the child stole away, to tell of the change in my condition.

I lay still, thinking. The stupor induced by grief, exhaustion, and the opiates, which had held my senses in thrall for a whole week, had saved me an illness both of body and mind. I awoke with all my faculties unimpaired, and with a feeling of physical power that seemed at variance with my present situation. I felt disposed to rise and dress, but waited until someone should come to me; and meantime I lay still, trying to realize the blank that had come in my life.

The week of sleep counted as nothing to me. It seemed so short a time since my boy had come bounding into my room, begging leave to ride his young horse; and yet I knew that he lay sleeping in the quiet churchyard, that he had passed utterly and entirely from my world, that I should see his bright face and hear his merry voice no more, that when I resumed my daily life, all would be as if Lovel had never lived amongst us.

I seemed to see as by a lightning flash all that the boy had been to me, and the desolation that his death must bring.

"It was I who killed him," I said to myself. "It is just that the puishment should fall upon me."

When my husband came to me he found me quite calm. My grief was too deep-seated to find relief in tears or lamentations. He was very gentle and tender; neither then nor at any other time did he, by word or look, reproach me for the act which

had deprived us of one of our children. I was greatly touched by his forbearance, and our sorrow drew us gradually more closely together; but for the first few days and weeks I could not feel entirely at ease even with him, and was really happier with my little Ursula for my companion than with anyone else

Lovel's name was never mentioned in my presence by any other member of the household. The boys had been cautioned, and they abstained from all allusion to their brother; and between my husband and me stood that mutual consciousness of my folly and self-will which made the subject a painful one. But with Ursula all was different. She spoke and thought of Lovel as of one not very far away—as of one not lost, but gone before into a land that was very bright, yet not so very distant.

Ah, blessed, simple faith of childhood! How much it taught me during those dark days!

My thoughts dwelt very much, at this time, upon the mysteries of death. I had now watched by three death-beds, and seen three human souls pass away into the valley of the shadow.

My mother's death was so calm and peaceful that it never seemed like death, but only a sweet sleep from which she never woke. My mother-in-law, too, passed away, fearless and calm, trusting to her "crucified Saviour" and the redemption He had bought. And both these deaths had produced

upon me a certain undefined impression—a certain sense of wonder and of envy, and a wish that I too could feel the assurance of a Saviour's love, strong enough to support me in a mortal conflict.

To me the valley of the shadow looked inexpressibly dark and awful. Sometimes, before the birth of my children, when my thoughts had turned upon possibilities, I had shrunk with unspeakable terror from the idea of that dread passage from life to death, and had marvelled more and more how anyone could find courage to enter it without a fear or a sight.

But then, I had argued, my mother and Mrs. Baskerville were elderly women. They had passed life's meridian long since, and had learnt lessons impossible to the young and happy. They had been sobered by trials and losses; their lives had been lived out, and they were content to go. When I had lived as long as they, I told myself, I too should be ready, even glad to die; but it was not natural for the young to be so willing to leave all that makes life bright. The dark valley must be very terrible to them.

And now?

Now I had seen my bright and happy boy pass away, without a doubt or a fear, into the unknown land. He was no mere infant, my Lovel, unconscious of the worth of life or the power of death. He was eleven years old, and forward in mind and

thought as in body. He loved the beautiful world that had been such a happy place to him. He did not wish to leave life and to go away into the unknown land of the grave. He had sufficient mental strength to think of all this, and to reason about it; and yet, when the summons came, he could meet it without a fear, and go away into the black darkness, that was no darkness to him, because Jesus was there.

What was the meaning of it all? I was no heathen; I too believed in God and in Christ. I knew that God's power and His presence were everywhere. I knew that He was mightier than death; but knowledge brought no comfort to me —no *personal* sense of security. I could not face death calmly, with only my cold knowledge and careless belief to cling to.

It is hardly surprising that I should feel thus. I had never yet realized that the Saviour's great work is to teach us how to *live* rightly and happily. It is after a life of trust in Him, and experience of His love, that death comes as a "falling asleep." I had many lessons to learn, and this one came in a sharp and terrible experience.

What made the subtle difference between me and others? This question I often put to myself; but I could not answer it. It was through Ursula's simple words that the answer came at last.

"Ursula," I said one day, "if you were to die,

would Jesus take you as you say He took Lovel?"

She looked up with a sudden smile in her eyes.

"Oh, yes, mother; I know he would. I think, perhaps, He would bring Lovel with Him."

"How do you know He would take you?" I asked. "Is it because you read the Bible, and try to be good?"

Ursula shook her head with decision, and my heart sank, for I was reading and striving after right, in order to win for myself a place in the promised heaven.

"What then?" I asked; and the child, looking down at a page before her, answered softly:

"It's because He loves us, and says, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'"

Simple, familiar words; but they struck upon my ears to-day with a new meaning.

"Have you gone to Him, Ursula?"

"Oh, yes, mother dear."

"How can you?" I asked. "You cannot go to Him as those little children did whose mothers took them."

Questions like these made Ursula rather shy; but I could hear the softly-spoken answer, even though her head was bent low.

"We can love Him. When we pray we go to Him. He is always quite near, though we can't

see Him till we die; but we know He is. The Bible says so."

Always the same assurance—the Bible says so. How well that child knew the Bible, and how little I did! I never could draw from its pages the sweet promises she did.

"God can't be near everyone, you know, Ursula," I objected, talking to her as if she had been almost a woman. "Think how many wicked people there are in the world. He can't be near them too."

The child seemed to turn this idea over in her mind, and then she looked up quickly, with a strange light as of inspiration shining in her eyes.

"Mother," she said earnestly, "don't you think it's like this, perhaps? God is just as near them, only they put up their sins like a wall, and keep Him away."

The words fell on my conscience with a curious sense of significance. Was that what I had been doing all my life long—raising up a wall of partition between my soul and God?

"Does sin keep God away?" I asked.

"Oh, yes! He cannot come into our hearts whilst the sin is there."

"Then what can we do?"

Ursula now thought I was questioning her for her own benefit, as the children's father often did on a Sunday afternoon. Her answers came more readily.

"We must get it taken away."

"How?"

"We must go to Jesus, and ask Him to wash it all away in His blood."

"And will he?"

"Oh, yes, always, if He sees we are really sorry, and if we believe in Him."

"Believe what?"

She looked at me quickly, and answered, quoting her father now:

"Believe that He is the Son of God, and that He died for our sins, and that He wants to wash every one of us as white as snow, if we will repent and go to Him."

Familiar words, I say again; but with what a new force they struck upon my ear! I felt suddenly overcome; and, burying my face in my hands I sobbed aloud.

Ursula thought I was weeping for Lovel; and she pressed her little head against me in silent sympathy. Presently, as my sobs decreased in violence, she rose and stood beside me, and passed her soft arms round my neck

"Mother dear, don't cry," she whispered. "Lovel is so happy; don't let us wish him back, or be unhappy. We shall see him again some day. And Jesus will send you a Comforter."

"You are my best comforter," I sobbed.

"Oh, no, mother," answered the child firmly and

gently. "I am only a little girl. But Jesus will send you a Comforter who will never go away."

"What do you mean, my darling?" I asked, catching her suddenly in my arms, for why did she speak as if she might go away? "What do you mean?"

"I mean the Holy Spirit, mother," she answered. "Jesus called Him the Comforter. I think it means that the Holy Spirit helps us and comforts us whenever we are unhappy. Jesus said He would send the Comforter to the disciples, to stay with them always; and if He sent Him to them, I'm sure He'll send him to us too."

A distant shout of "Ursula!" somewhere in the house took the little maid away; but her words seem to ring in my ears with strange power. It is ever thus in life. We go on our way for a time, careless and unthinking; sacred truths are heard and accepted without any sense of true conviction; beautiful words of love, and tender promises of help, pass by unheeded, whilst we say in our hearts that we do not need such help, that we are strong enough to stand alone. And then one day our pride is humbled to the dust, our broken hearts and contrite spirits are attuned to hear the words we have scorned, and to read their lessons aright, and we are open to influences which in former days would have passed us by without moving us one whit.

Thus it was with me at least. I had passed through a bitter, fiery trial. My old armor of cold indifference had fallen from me, and the Word of God, like a two-edged sword, had cleft my heart in twain, and shown me all its hideous bareness.

I sank upon my knees and prayed, as I had never prayed in my life before—such a prayer as can hardly be prayed twice in a life-time—for it was a wrestling with doubt, darkness, and despair, such as can hardly fall upon the same spirit more than once on its journey through this mortal life.

My child's soft hand had placed within mine the key whereby to escape from this blank darkness; but in my loneliness and desolation of heart I felt the need of a stronger hand than hers to lean upon. How could her innocent soul know aught of the terrible conflict raging in mine?

Suddenly I felt a strong arm round me.

My husband had entered unobserved, and was now kneeling beside me.

For an hour we knelt together, and over that hour I must draw the veil of silence. Even now I cannot speak of that most sacred time, in which our two souls were knit together in the love of our Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Suffice it to say that ere we rose from our knees I had learned the lesson—the great lesson this life

holds for us; and that I had learnt, too, to know and to love the husband I had married, but whom until now I had never truly loved. My soul was awakened at last from its long sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FADING FLOWER.

HOW often do we notice that, when Death has once made an entrance into a house, he seldom seems content with one victim! Sometimes he strikes again and yet again, as if his hand would never stay: but even when this is not the case, we frequently remark the fact that a death seldom comes alone, and have an instinctive fear that one will be followed by a second.

Three quiet weeks had passed since Lovel's death, weeks of mingled sadness and joy, in which I learned the bitterness of grief and the healing powers of God's love, in a manner that was utterly strange to me; when I was destined to be rudely roused from the tranquil state of restful and refreshing calmness into which I had sunk.

I was sitting one day in my boudoir, with my little Uusula beside me, and we had been reading together from the Book she so greatly loved, when

we were interrupted by Dr. Hornbury, who still considered me a sort of patient of his.

Ursula put away her book and prepared to go, as she always did when the doctor came to see me. He patted her head and spoke a few words to her as she passed him, and I fancied he looked at her rather closely.

When she had gone, he looked out of the window and took a pinch of snuff. He did not ask me any questions about my health, but remarked in an abstracted way:

"That child wants change of air and scene."

"Change?"

"Yes, I'd take her down to the sea if I were you, and brace her up. It would do you good yourself too; but the child needs it."

An anxious pain seemed to clutch at my heart.

"You do not think her ill?"

He still looked out of the window and took more snuff before answering.

"I don't say she is ill; but I don't like her looks. You try what a change will do."

"The house lies low," I remarked, "and the weather has been very hot. It has tried everyone. The Mount—my husband's place, you know—is much cooler and more bracing. Do you think we had better go back there?"

"Try the sea first—try the sea first," advised the old man. "If that doesn't set her up, take her

back to the Mount"—and here he paused to clear his throat, whilst I looked at him with a kind of fearful anxiety that could not be translated into words.

My husband came in at this moment, and was startled at the expression of my face.

"What is it?" he asked quickly.

"Ursula—Dr. Hornbury thinks her ill," I answered with a sort of gasp.

"My dear madam—" began the doctor; but he knew me well enough not to attempt to equivocate. "The fact is," he concluded hastily, "the child has had a shock; and she ought to be taken away from a place so full of associations."

"A shock?"

"Yes, a shock—do you suppose it was no shock to a sensitive child like that, to see her brother brought in senseless and covered with blood? Do you suppose it was no shock for her to see him die—you tell me she was with him to the last—and then to see you fall down in your turn, and remain unconscious for a week? Then a funeral brings its own sense of fear to a child's mind—there is something very awful in all that show of black. Altogether the little girl has had too much of it. She is looking thin and white, and her head looks as if it thought from morning till night."

My husband listened very gravely.

"It did not seem a shock at the time," he said.

"The child seemed more composed than any of us."

"That has nothing to do with it—indeed, I think it makes matters rather worse than better," answered the doctor hastily. "If children scream and cry, one knows things are all right, and can deal with them by the usual method. But when they take things in a calm, composed way, as your little daughter did, it shows a temperament that I don't like to see in children. Depend upon it she has taken it all in, and thinks it all over and over again, by day and night. Things sink deep where no outward expression is given. That child's eyes have a look I do not like to see. It is too unearthly for my taste."

I knew so well what he meant—I too had seen that spiritual look in my Ursula's deep eyes, that made me think, as I watched her, how near a child's soul may be to the angel world around us. But I had never thought that this nearness of soul implied a fragility of body, such as my old friend had detected. In a moment a strange presentiment seized me with a force past all resisting. I knew from that time forth that my little girl would die; that God would call to Himself the soul that longed to be gathered to its Saviour; and that the little angel-child, who had been lent to me, and had led me to Jesus, would now be taken away, to shine as one of the jewels in His crown.

I think this certainty from the first moment saved me much pain in the days that lay before me.

I took my trouble straight to One who was Himself a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. I knelt before Him and poured out my whole soul in prayer; and I did not rise from my knees until I had been able to say from the very bottom of my heart, "Thy will be done."

Oh, wonderful power of prayer! Those only who have taken to God their troubles and their anguish of soul, those alone can know that deep and wondrous calm that stills the tempest-tossed soul, as though a still small voice made itself heard above the tumult, saying, "Peace, be still"; and at that voice the tempest cannot but cease in a great calm—the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

Yes, my little Ursula, I gave you up. I never grudged you the happiness of the strange, new life to which you soon awoke. I gave you willingly up into the keeping of the Heavenly Father. I was glad to yield to Him the fairest of the children He had given me.

We went away together—my frail little daughter and I—to a sweet, sunny, breezy place upon the south coast; and there we passed three quiet weeks, to which I shall always look back with a sense of gratitude that is akin to joy. Very tender memories rise up before me, as I carry my mind back to

those days. I was brought into close communion with the purest, sweetest soul, I think, that ever yet drew breath; and though it was but the soul of a child, what then? Do we not sometimes obtain strange glimpses of the meaning of those significant words, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes"; and again, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou perfected praise?" Do we not from time to time learn from the guileless lips of children, lessons that we have missed in the busy whirl of life?

Someone has said of children that the light of the heaven they have lately left shines upon their pathway for a while; and when their steps are tending straight for the heavenly goal, may it not be that the heavenly radiance grows brighter round them as they move?

I think my little Ursula knew very soon that the call had gone forth, and that she was following Lovel's footsteps down towards the dark valley.

"Mother," she said quietly to me one day, as we sat together upon the sand, and watched the play of the great waves, as they rolled in under the sunny sky, "mother, am I going to die soon?"

The question did not surprise me. Ursula was too thoughtful a child not to be aware of a great deal that would pass unheeded by many little ones.

"I do not know, my darling," I answered. "No-

body has told me so. They have sent us here for you to get stronger."

Ursula sat with her chin in her hand and looked out over the sea.

"I thought so," she answered; "but I don't get any stronger; I get weaker every day."

I was quite aware of this, and I drew the child tenderly towards me, a great yearning rising up within me that made speech somewhat difficult.

"My darling would not be afraid to go to Jesus, if He called for her?"

"Oh, no, mother dear," she answered, looking up with one of her sudden radiant smiles; and after a pause she added dreamily, "You know I asked Lovel to ask if I might come soon. He has not forgotten, has he?"

I pressed my darling close in my arms. I too had never forgotten the words that had once passed between the two children at Lovel's dying bed.

"Do you want to leave me, Ursula?" I could not refrain from asking. "Could you not be happy to stay with us a little while?"

She looked up with a shy wistfulness in her glance.

"I do not think I knew you then, mother," she said. "I thought you only cared for Lovel. It was naughty of me. Will you forgive me?" and she put up her mouth for a kiss.

How my heart smote me as I pressed my lips to

hers! So even my children had seen how wrapped up I was in one, to the exclusion of all the rest! Ursula's words were bitterly true. I had in reality only cared for Lovel. I had never valued this little tender blossom, until the reaper whose name is Death had whetted his sickle and prepared to take it away.

"I know better now," continued Ursula after a pause. "You are such a dear, dear mother. I love you so very, very much. I don't want to leave you, only I should best like to go to Jesus, for I love Him best of all. It isn't naughty, is it?" and she looked up with an undefined doubt in her sweet eyes.

"No, my darling," I answered. "I am glad, so glad, that Jesus comes first of all; and although I love my precious little girl more than I can say, I am not going to grieve if I have to let her go. The tender Shepherd will take better care of my little lamb than I can do; and if He calls her and gathers her in His arms I shall try to be glad, and shall only wait more gladly for the great day when He will call me too, and give me my children back again."

Ursula nestled very close in my arms. I knew that with her it was best to be open. Indeed, I could not hide from her what was in my heart. Our souls seemed strangely knit together, by the

unity of our thoughts and sympathies. Presently she looked up with a smile.

"That is so nice," she said with a sigh, as of satisfaction. "I didn't want you to fret; I couldn't bear you to cry for me as you did for Lovel. Mother dear, did the Comforter come?"

"He did, darling, He did."

"And he will stay with you always?"

"I trust so. God grant I may never close my heart to him again!"

The last words did not reach the child's ears. She looked up with a sweet smile.

"Then you won't need to cry when I go away, because you will have the Comforter with you to take the trouble away."

It was with words like this that my precious child cheered and strengthened me. I can repeat their substance, even after the lapse of all these years; but nothing can reproduce the childlike sweetness and simplicity of voice and look, the wonderful nearness to God, which seemed to wrap her round as with an atmosphere. She often talked of the beautiful heaven whither she was going, as one might do who had really seen its glories. Sometimes it seemed to me that her eyes did indeed look upon the glory towards which she was tending.

One day she said:

"Mother, may I go home soon? I like this

place, and the sea is lovely; and it is nice having you all to myself. But I seem to want to be at home; and I am sure dear father must miss you dreadfully. I mustn't be selfish. You see I don't get any better; and I should like to see them all again and to die at home."

So we went back to Lydgate.

Some kind of epidemic had broken out near to the Mount; therefore we could not go thither, and it was no longer any use blinding our eyes to the fact that our tender flower was fading fast, and that no air, and no change of scene, would keep her much longer with us.

So we came back to my old home; and I think I was glad to know that, when the time came, I should lay my little daughter to rest by the side of my brave boy, in the quiet spot where I myself had elected to be buried when my turn should come to lay down the burden of life.

I did not look forward with any dread to the passage through the dark valley.

Days passed quietly and swiftly onward, and the little lamp burned lower and lower in its socket, yet burned ever with a clearer, brighter ray.

I had my husband now to lean upon, his love to cheer me, his courage to strengthen me, and, above all, I had that blessed assurance of inward peace, without which all outward help is vain, and I never faltered over my daily prayer, but said "Thy will

be done" with all the strength that was left me.

The child's mind was nearly always clear by day; but in the night she sometimes wandered a little.

She would talk of Lovel, and the conversations they had held together, of which I had never dreamt, and sometimes a pained look would come into her eyes and she would say:

"Mother says I am too little to understand about God; but it never says in the Bible that we mayn't love Him because we're little. Jesus must have liked children, I think. I wish I had lived when He did. Perhaps mother would have taken me to Him then."

How my heart smote me when I heard words like these! How they rang in my ears!

"Perhaps mother would have taken me to Him *then!*"

Ah! how true are unconscious words that fall from the lips of childhood! I had not taken my little ones to Jesus. I had not even found the way to Him myself. And now I was to learn from my dying child that she had been dimly conscious of this neglect. My little Ursula had early found the Lord; but it was not I who had taken her to Him.

But I could not give way to grief or self-reproach. I could not even greatly regret that my child had found her own way to the foot of the Cross. No human teaching could have led her there so safely,

and my neglect had been atoned for by One Whose teaching never errs.

Ursula clung greatly to me during these days of weakness and pain. She was wonderfully patient, but her head troubled her a good deal, and nothing so soothed her as to rest in my arms, whilst I gently rocked her, and sang to her, or whispered sweet words from the Book she loved so well.

If her father were also sitting by and holding one of her shadowy hands, her satisfaction seemed complete; and many hours did we thus spend, lulling her into the sleep that rarely came for an hour or two after midnight.

One night as we were thus engaged, watching her more closely and tenderly than usual, for the doctor had told us the end must be very near, she suddenly opened her eyes wide, and raised herself up on my shoulder.

"Lovel!" she cried gladly.

My heart stood still as I followed the direction of her glance, which was fixed upon the dim shadows of the room. I looked again at the little white face, which beamed with the joy of welcome.

"Lovel!" she cried again, more faintly.

"Mother dear, Jesus has sent Lovel. I can see him. He is beckoning me. Yes, Lovel, I will come. Kiss me, mother darling, and father too. I am going to Jesus."

I could barely catch the whispered words, spoken

with the last failing breath. We just had time to kiss our child, before she went away from us.

She went out of the world, our precious little lamb, with the same Name upon her lips that had been upon Lovel's—the Name of Jesus.

Good Shepherd, take our lambs, and keep them safe in Thy fold, and gather us to them when our time shall come!

What shall we say as we give them up to Thee? Shall we weep or repine? Shall we not rather gladly say, "The Lord hath called the child," and bless Him that it is so?—for with the children thus called, most certainly and surely "It is well."

CHAPTER XIV.

SOWING AND REAPING.

AFTER the death of my two children, four very quiet, peaceful years passed over my head. My boys were all at school: Tom at Eton, where the two younger joined him so soon as they had reached a suitable age, and for the greater part of the year my husband and I were alone together in our home, learning a mutual love and confidence like nothing I had ever known before. It was a revelation to me of my reserved husband's true nature and character, for which I gave God thanks each day of my life. He took, as it were, my hand in his, and led me along the path he had followed so steadily all his life long—the path that leads to life everlasting—and with his constant sympathy and help, and with the guidance of the Spirit of God—the Comforter my little Ursula had talked about—I was able, without many back-

ward slips, to walk beside him, and to learn the love, and trust, and steadfast confidence in God so characteristic of my noble husband.

In a nature like mine, there was great danger that the flame of love and religious joy, once kindled, should blaze up rapidly and burn itself out. The exalted state I often reached, during the days preceding and following my child's death, could not but leave behind a certain deadness of spirit when the reaction set in and the strain of tension had passed. Many dangers beset me—danger of overmuch zeal, to be followed by listless apathy; danger of doubts and fears when my ardent, burning prayers were not immediately answered; danger of sinking back into the careless state from which I had been aroused; but from all these dangers I was by God's mercy, saved, and that through the deep, unvarying tenderness, the constant support, and earnest guidance given me by the husband I had learnt at last to love as he deserved.

Hand in hand we trod life's hills together, looking upward and outward towards the eternal home which our two children had already gained.

Two years after the death of Lovel and Ursula, twin children were born to me—a boy and a girl—given to me, as it seemed, in place of the two little ones I had lost.

I had some thoughts of calling them by the names of the little ones who had gone away, but

in the end I decided against this, and they were christened Elizabeth and Malcolm

Very dear to me were these two tiny children, sent just when my boys were little with me, and were growing out of those childish ways and confidences which are so sweet to a mother's heart.

My husband was as proud as I was of our two babies, and, of the four peaceful years of which I spoke, the two last were peculiarly bright and sweet.

And after they had passed by—two years and four months after the birth of the twins—my husband died.

I shall not say much of this time, nor of the days that followed. Even now, although the pain and grief are so long past, and the reunion in the eternal home drawing so near, I shrink from recalling that time, and would pass it by with as few words as possible.

My husband was only ill three days. He had a slight cold, but we neither of us paid much heed to it, for he was a strong man and little troubled by any kind of ailment. He went out in a cold east wind, on a long drive, and got both chilled and wet before he returned. The cold settled upon his chest. Violent inflammation of the lungs set in, and in three days the struggle was over.

For three days and nights I never left his side, and at the end of that time I closed his eyes, and

knew that in this world I should see his face no more.

He was buried at Lydgate, by his own especial wish. His grave is next to the one that holds our two sweet children. I chose the motto for his last resting-place—he would have selected something different; but I chose this:

"*The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*"

The same stone bears the name of Lovel and Ursula, and their motto is this:

"*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.*"

These words would equally apply to each of my three loved ones, who lay sleeping beneath the grass and the flowers. I had watched those three souls go out into the unknown silent land—my bright, laughing, wayward boy, who had gone with a brave smile upon his face, fearless and without a murmur; my little white-souled daughter, who had been glad to lay down her weary little frame and go to be with Jesus; and even my husband, full of life's vigor and life's interests, bound to life by those chains of love to wife and children that are so very hard to tear asunder, even he had bowed his head to God's decree, and had no words but "Thy will be done" with which to meet the Heavenly Father's call. He, though his heart had

bled for me, had no fears for himself. The dark valley had no terrors; he went forward calmly and resolutely, holding my hand to the very end, and murmuring with his last faint breath:

"Surely I will be with thee."

Thus I was left alone, widowed and desolate, to take up the shattered remnants of my life, and do with them what I could.

It was in March that my husband died, the March of 1838. The boys were at home for their Easter holidays, but they went back again to school as usual, saddened and subdued, and rather glad, I think, to escape from the mournful surroundings of a shadowed home.

Tom was nearly seventeen, and was to leave school at Midsummer. We had intended sending him to the University; but he did not show any great aptitude for study, and my husband expressed a wish on his death-bed that the lad should remain at home after his school career closed, to help me with the management of the two properties. He had a better head for business and for farming than for Latin and Greek, said the father, who had been so much to the boy, and his place in the future would be at home with his mother.

But for the present I was alone in the great house, with only my two tiny children for my companions.

Perhaps their merry prattle and unconsciousness of grief was the best solace I could have found. It was very sad to think that they would never remember the father who had loved them so proudly and fondly; and the tears would spring to my eyes at their calls for "dada," or "baba;" but they were old enough to be distressed to see me cry, and would look up in my face with so much serious gravity and incipient sorrow, that I was forced to wipe away the tears and to smile back into the dear little faces, and the children were my best comforters in those sad days.

I tried hard not to murmur against God, and I think I resigned myself to His will. I told myself again and again that He would not try me beyond my strength, and that with the trial would be sent grace and help to withstand the shock of grief and loss.

I prayed without ceasing that my will might be made one with His, and earnest prayer is never made in vain. God heard me and answered me, and those dark and bitter days were made a blessing. My earthly prop had been taken away, but God gave me His own Spirit for my stay and support.

In the summer the boys came home, and we were all together at Lydgate, where for the future I intended to reside. The Mount was let for four years, after which time it would become the pro-

perty of my eldest son, who would then have attained his majority.

This arrangement was made by my own wish. I loved Lydgate well, and now that the graves of my loved ones were there, I seemed more bound to it than ever. My husband had come into considerable sums of money from time to time, by the death of various relatives, and he could afford to leave both land and money to Tom, without robbing the younger children. We had talked the matter over, and decided that the Mount should be left unreservedly to the lad, and that he should have full possession at twenty-one.

Tom was seventeen at this time—a tall, strong, grave youth, not very popular—although much respected by his comrades at school, and more feared than liked, as it seemed to me, by his high-spirited young brothers. He was very reserved, and had only made one friend all through his life and that friend was his father.

Now rather a painful task lies before me—a page of my life over which I would gladly turn without note or comment ; but I shall not do so, because I wish to give an example of that great truth which we so steadily disregard and try to disbelieve—that what we have sown that *must* we also reap, and that the mercy of God that fully *forgives* the sins we have repented of, does not alter His own immutable law, or change that just decree.

And what had my sowing been in the years of my early married life?

I had not yielded to my husband the true meed of wifely love and obedience, and I had allowed my children to see this. I had not loved my sons with any real maternal love; and, although they had never been actually neglected, they knew quite well—as what children do not?—that it was not to the mother they must run for ready help, or sympathy, or comfort, in the hundred little joys and sorrows of childhood.

I was *uncertain* with my children—oh, fatal fault! —they never knew in what mood they would find me. Sometimes I could make them almost adore me for a brief space, but it was only a passing feeling, engendered by over-much indulgence and a surfeit of caresses. It did not stand the test of time. It was to the quiet, undemonstrative father, ever kind and ever just, that the real confidence and love of the boys were given.

Impressions made upon the young do not easily change or fade. The past four years, which had wrought a change in me, had been passed by the boys away from home, and in the midst of other and vivid interests. They had known nothing of what had grown up during those years. The impressions—undefined and vague, perhaps, but not the less strong for that—with which they had

grown up still continued, and I was to reap what my hand had sown.

What I first observed, when my three great boys came home for the summer holidays, was a certain almost sullen reserve of manner on the part of Tom, and an indefinable lawlessness about the other two. It was as if they knew that a strong hand had been taken off the reins, and that they meant by degrees to shake off restraint and become their own masters.

They were not exactly disobedient or openly defiant, but I felt, with a vague sense of uneasiness, that my authority was not powerful, and was glad that the school days of the two younger lads were not yet over.

I did my utmost for them, but I fell into an error, which many mothers do, and the unwisdom of which I can see now, although at the time I acted as I believed for the best.

In plain words, I *over-talked* my boys ; I overdid them with religious instruction.

I knew that although I had been negligent upon this point, yet that their father had done much to supply this lack, and now I endeavored to fill both places myself, and to bring home to the hearts of the boys the deep lessons that I myself had learnt late, but which had sunk deeply in my nature. I knew these lessons could not be learnt too young, I knew that all else was dross in comparison with

these golden truths, and I felt as if I could not rest until my boys were at one with me in what I fain would teach them. But in my eagerness I forgot two very important facts.

I forgot that early impressions and traditions cannot be effaced, and I forgot that due allowance must be made for temperament and circumstances.

Let me explain myself a little more clearly, if I can.

There is in the young a very deep sense that is best expressed by the word justice, and, although they are hardly aware of it, they have a great respect for, and a sound appreciation of consistency. They are too young and inexperienced to reconcile apparent inconsistencies, and the breadth of view we gain in after life is of necessity denied to them. They can only see sharply defined lines of right and wrong. They judge their elders with a certain stern rectitude that these same elders little expect, and they reach conclusions which would be very startling if openly revealed. Moreover, all young people, more especially boys, have an inherent detestation of anything approaching "humbug."

Now, my boys were shrewd observers enough. They were quite aware that I was trying to rouse in them a religious fervor which I had not myself possessed at their age, and they resented this as an act of injustice and needless intolerance. They

did not mind reading a daily portion of Scripture, as they had done with their father, or answering questions upon what they read; but they could not endure the searching questions which I, in my anxiety, and in the responsibility of my position, could not refrain from putting from time to time, and they began to shun me with a natural boyish shyness, afraid lest I should introduce such subjects, or to give flippant, hasty answers, little knowing what pain they inflicted by so doing.

I did not know the way to appeal to boys' hearts. My husband had never found the difficulty I did in winning confidence. He would talk in a quiet, unemotional way about the things of God. He would tell his sons of the battle with sin, and of the armor they must wear for the fight. He did not look for them to feel any deep personal sense of sin and need for a Redeemer's love. He waited patiently for that to come in its own time, as come it will to each one of us, but not to all at the same age, or at the will of man, but in answer to the power of God. He did not strive to work upon the boys' *feelings*, but upon their understanding and their conviction. He knew how little good feeling alone can do, how quickly it passes, how easily it leads to self-deception and inward blindness. What he strove zealously to do was to prepare the soil, and sow the good seed deep down, and be content to leave the rest with God, Who

would make it spring up in His good time. Whereas I was forever trying to disturb the soil, to see if the seed were germinating, and every week that passed by without outward and visible result, seemed to me a week lost, and my heart sickened within me, lest my early neglect should have proved fatal, and the boys' spirits ever remain insensible to heavenly influences.

I suffered very acutely in those days. Sometimes my heart failed within me. I sickened for the help and guidance of the husband who had been such a prop and stay for me. It seemed sometimes as if the burden laid upon me was almost more than I could bear. I was responsible for the souls (so I told myself at least) of these boys, and I was unable to obtain any hold at all over them, none at least so far as I could see, and this by my own act and neglect, for I had not tried to win their confidence as children, and now the power to do so had gone.

Once I might have done anything with Thomas. He loved me with a fearful, adoring love, almost doglike in its humility and constancy; but years of separation and school life had dulled this feeling, and now I could not trace any special love towards me in my eldest son.

He was cold, reserved, and unresponsive. Nothing I could say or do seemed to change this attitude. He was respectful, and sometimes at-

tentive, but I knew no more of his inner life than if he had been a total stranger.

My husband had often told me that Tom had a really fine nature, and this in the end proved to be the case; but I suppose no one who has studied the characters of the young will deny that the best and strongest characters are sometimes sadly hard to understand or deal with, during the period of development. They seem set round with angles and bristles. There is no getting near them, no way of gaining their confidence. They show all their bad points, and carefully hide away the good that lies beneath, and give to those who love them a world of anxiety and fear, which the future proves to have been needless.

So, at least, it was with my first-born. He had thoughts and feelings beyond his years, and yet he had all the faults of disposition incident to his age and temperament, and just when he most needed his father's counsel and help, his father was taken away from him.

We might have helped and comforted one another, but it was not to be. Again I had to reap that which I had sown.

Tom had seen, in his boyhood's years, that I did not treat his father with the respect I should have done. He knew nothing of the union of soul we had enjoyed for the past four years, and he could not forget the painful impressions he had received in

his boyhood. He could not render to me the love and reverence I had denied to his father, and for many years we were strangers in heart to one another.

All this I learnt later, when the barrier was at last broken down, but at the time I never guessed why my son was cold to me, nor realized in full measure how inexorably I was reaping the harvest I had sowed.

CHAPTER XV.

A SNOWY NIGHT.

MATTERS were much as I have described them between my son and me, when another change, which was destined to influence our lives, suddenly befell us.

Summer had passed, and a wet, cheerless autumn was merging into a bitter, snowy winter; Harold and Arthur were at school, and Tom and the babies my companions at home, when suddenly and without warning a new member was added to our household.

I well remember that day, or rather that night. A heavy, silent snow had fallen for many hours, and it lay like a pall upon the frosty ground. The cold was bitter, and the cruel north-east wind seemed to cut the skin from the face of those who were bold enough to face it.

My day had been sadly spent. I was suffering intensely from loneliness and a settled discouragement and depression, almost harder to bear than poignant grief.

I told myself in my sadness that my life had been one long terrible mistake. I looked back at the years of wasted opportunities, and I felt as if the burden was greater than I could bear. I had scorned my husband, I had neglected my children, and alienated their affections. I had no friend at hand to help me, no human adviser to whom to turn for aid, and in my present dejected state the lamp of faith burned but dimly, and it was hard to raise my eyes to heaven and draw my comfort thence.

I was suffering both mentally and physically from the inevitable seclusion of winter country life. Never before had I felt so painfully the isolation of Lydgate, for never before had I been without the constant companionship of mother or husband, with whom I could exchange confidences and talk over the little incidents of daily life.

But Tom was no talker, and did not understand the art of making conversation. If he had something to say he would say it, if not he would remain silent; and he very seldom did have much to say to me. He knew that once I had thought him awkward, stupid, uncouth; and he never could feel really at ease in my presence.

My little children were my great comfort and resource, but even their baby love and sweetness could not quite satisfy the craving hunger of my soul. I wanted something more, some fellowship

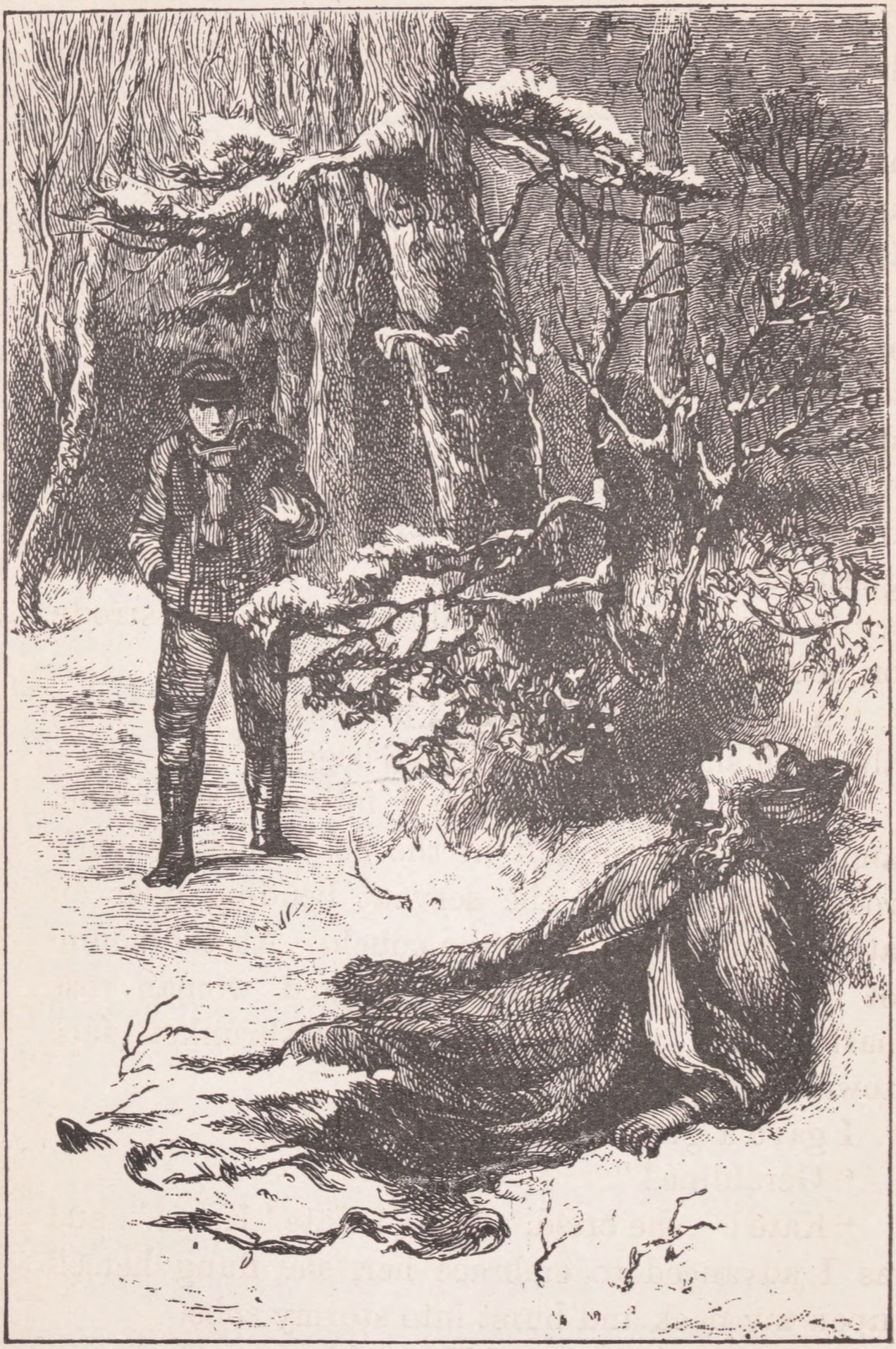
with one who could enter just a little more into my thoughts and needs, some one who had known life in its joy and its sorrow, and could give me the sympathy of comprehension.

The desire and craving for this human sympathy is implanted in our very nature, and cannot, I think, be termed wrong, though there are those who say that God's love, and that alone, should be enough for us. It is very true that God can indeed take the place, in one sense, of all earthly ties—be Father, Husband, Friend, and Brother. But yet He has never taught us to undervalue human love in its own place; and we know that our Lord clung to human friends during His sad pilgrimage on earth, and keenly felt their death or desertion.

So I was very sad that day; and as I sat with Tom in the drawing-room after dinner, I was conscious that tears were slowly filling my eyes, and dropping upon the page I seemed to study. Tom observed this presently, and partly out of natural horror of tears, partly, no doubt, lest they should be a prelude to a conversation such as he dreaded, he rose hastily, and with a few muttered words about looking at the weather, he quitted the room, and even the house, for I heard the door bang behind him.

I do not know how long I was alone before Tom came back in a state of unusual excitement.

"Mother," he said, "I went out, just to see how



deep the drifts were getting down the drive, when I heard a groan, and found a poor creature lying half frozen in the snow. I carried her to the housekeeper's room, and she soon came to herself, and asked for you—only she called you "Miss Lovel," till her head got clearer. She says she knew you once, and was coming to find you; but she couldn't tell me who she was or anything about herself till she had seen you."

I rose at once and followed my impatient son from the room, greatly marvelling who this strange guest could be.

"Is she a lady?" I asked of Tom, as he strode on before me.

"Yes," he answered. "I am sure she is that; although she looks more like a beggar."

More and more puzzled, I followed my guide, and soon found myself in the cosy housekeeper's room, where I saw the servant bending over an attenuated figure upon the couch. At the sound of our steps, the prostrate, ragged woman rose hastily, and turned a white and shrunken face towards me.

I gave a great cry of suprise.

"Geraldine!"

"Kate!" she cried, "Kate! Kate! Kate!" and as I advanced to embrace her, she flung herself upon my neck and burst into stormy sobs.

"Who is it?" I heard Tom whisper to the house-

keeper; but that good woman had not been long enough in my service to know anything of my cousin Geraldine, whom I had not seen for nearly twenty years.

I held her in my arms and let her sob upon my shoulder. I had loved her dearly once; and time, that heals all wounds, does not dull our remembrances of bygone affection. Geraldine was my own kin—the only blood-relative I could claim, and the old grievance between us belonged to the dead past. I pressed kisses upon the thin white face, and felt as if it were my sister I welcomed. In her sorrow and misery—be the cause what it might—she had come to me for help and shelter; was not that reason enough why I should receive her as my own?

The housekeeper discreetly retired; but Tom stood by, silent and amazed.

Geraldine's sobs ceased at last, and she lifted herself up and looked at me.

"Ah, Kate!" she said, "you have hardly changed in all these years. You are young and beautiful still, but I—ah! what a wreck I am!"

"Mother," said Tom, coming one step nearer, "do tell me who it is."

We both turned and looked at the tall youth who put this half-impatient question.

"It is my cousin," I answered. "Mrs. Scrope."

Tom was none the wiser. I had never talked of

Geraldine since her marriage, first from pique and then from habit. I could now see that my son was vexed at not even knowing the name of his mother's cousin.

Geraldine turned and held out her hand to him with her own old winning smile.

"Your son, Kate?"

"Yes, my eldest son, Tom."

She looked admiringly at his tall, well-knit frame, and again she smiled.

"You saved my life to night," she said. "Perhaps it was not worth the saving; but yet I thank you. A lonely death upon a freezing snowdrift is not one to choose. I saw the lights of your mother's house, and sank down, unable to reach it. But for you I should have perished, almost on your threshold—and I thank you."

Tom stood very silent whilst this speech was made: but I saw that the helplessness and misery of this kinswoman touched him deeply. He lifted her hand to his lips, and then, as if half ashamed of such a display of feeling, he let it drop and walked hastily away.

Geraldine looked after him.

"Ah!" she said with a deep sigh, "if I had only had a son like that!"

"You have no child?" I asked gently.

"I have one still living—a daughter. She is in France. I could not, and would not, permit her to

be brought up in her father's house after she grew beyond her childhood. Ah no, Kate! Ask me no questions yet—I am weary and sick and despairing. Let me only rest. You shall hear all when I am fit to tell my tale."

"My poor, dear child," I answered, "come with me and rest."

I asked her no more questions, but took her up to my own room, undressed her myself, and laid her in my bed. She was weak and spent almost beyond the power of speech, now that the first excitement had worn itself out, and her emaciation was sad to see.

My heart overflowed with compassion, and a great wave of love and sympathy swept over me as I watched my poor cousin, whom last I had seen in the flush of her maiden beauty.

Yes, we had both been gay young girls together, and now we were both lonely, stricken women. A sense of deep tenderness towards my poor Geraldine stole over me. It seemed as though she had been sent in my hour of need, as she had come to me in hers. I was lonely and sad, she was desolate and in misery; what better could we do than love and comfort one another and renew the friendship of our youth?

As I fed my weary patient with such light food as she could take, she looked piteously up into my face.

"Kate," she said, "I behaved badly to you; have you forgiven me?"

"Oh, hush, darling," I answered, "there is nothing to forgive between friends and cousins."

"Ah, you are so good, so generous, you give me courage. You will not turn me out, Kate? You will shelter me here awhile?"

There was imploring terror in face and voice. I stooped and kissed her.

"My home shall be yours so long as ever you need it, Geraldine," I answered. "You have claimed my protection and hospitality, and I have granted it willingly and joyfully. Lydgate shall be your home so long as you stand in need of one, and are content to remain here."

She looked at me with wide-open eyes, in which wonder and relief struggled for mastery.

"Do you mean it, Kate?" she gasped. Will you never turn me out?"

"Never," I answered, kissing her again; "I promise it, Geraldine."

"Thank God! Thank God!" she cried, and cast her arms round my neck, sobbing weakly and unrestrainedly.

She sank to sleep at last, holding my hand. I sat watching her thin, white face, wondering about her past and forming dim pictures of the future.

My promise, hastily made and little considered, did not trouble me. I could not have done less for

one so lonely and desolate, even had friendship, not relationship, bound us together. As the head of my family, my duty was to shelter and protect my kinswoman. I had always made up my mind rapidly and upon impulse, and I must be pardoned in this instance for a precipitancy forced upon me as much by circumstances as by natural tendency to hasty judgment.

No misgiving troubled me as to the wisdom of the promise I had made. It seemed as if Geraldine had come to comfort as well as to be comforted, and my heart was full of gratitude that my early friend had been restored to me.

Geraldine was very weak and ill for many days, and during those days I gradually learnt her sad history.

Her husband had proved a selfish, heartless tyrant, and anything but a kind husband. He had been away a great deal on foreign service during the first eight years of her married life, and her health had obliged her to remain at home, only seeing him at intervals, and that for a very brief space.

He then gave up his soldier's life ; and with his abandonment of a career which he had really liked, and which had given him congenial occupation for body and mind, he seemed to lose all control of himself, and to know no restraint to his passions.

He was wealthy, and they lived in very great

style in the new home; but he played deep and drank deep, and turned his house into a place not fit for wife or daughter to visit.

Geraldine placed her only child under the care of some friends in France, for the girl showed indications of unusual beauty, and she was afraid lest her father should find this out, and begin to notice the child he had ignored because of her unwelcome sex.

She had been fourteen when sent away, and that was nearly three years ago. Her mother had only been able to visit her once during that time, for her husband grudged every penny not expended on his own pleasures.

The want of an heir embittered him against his wife; and, as unhappiness and care robbed her of her beauty, he became more neglectful, and more unkind. He openly lamented that he had ever married her, and became at last so brutal and so unrestrained in his excesses, that the miserable wife could bear her life no longer, but fled from her wretched home with little money and almost without clothes, feeling that death by the wayside was preferable to such a life as the one she had been leading. She almost wished she could lie down and die.

And in her hour of utter misery she had thought of her former friend, and longed inexpressibly to see her once again. She had heard from time to

time of my affairs. She knew that I was now a widow, and she believed that I was at Lydgate.

Nearly two hundred miles lay between her and me, and the purse with which she started was pitifully light. But Geraldine had a strength and courage of her own which could rise on emergency to a high pitch. She had resolutely set her face westward, and had steadily kept upon her way, sometimes driving, sometimes walking, and sometimes jogging along in a good-natured farmer's cart.

What a journey for my dainty, beautiful cousin! I could hardly bear to hear her tell the tale. She gradually made her way, mile by mile, until upon the afternoon of the snowstorm she had but seven more to traverse to find herself at her journey's end. She had ascertained that I was living at Lydgate. She had learned the shortest way over the fields, and, despite the warnings of those who predicted snow, she bravely set forward upon the seven miles' walk.

But she was spent and worn and ill. She had eaten little during these days, being unable to purchase such things as she could take, and her palate refusing those that were within her means. When the snow came on, it became a life-and-death struggle, and how it ended we have just seen.

"I nearly died at your door; but you have brought me to life and given me a home," she con-

cluded pathetically; "and yet I have no words to thank and bless you."

And that was the melancholy history of my poor cousin Geraldine, as I heard it from her own lips.

CHAPTER XVI.

LELIA.

GERALDINE recovered, after a few days' rest, sufficiently to come downstairs in the afternoon, and sometimes to take a little airing out of doors, either upon the terrace or in the carriage.

Tom constituted himself champion to our guest. He seemed to consider her in a measure his especial charge, and she accepted his rather clumsy, boyish gallantry with a grace and readiness that he found very flattering. He was always ready to offer her his arm when she felt equal to pace the terrace or the cloister, always at her disposal to drive her in the open carriage when she wished to take the air in that way, and indeed he seemed to have turned over a new leaf, and developed into the complete ladies' man.

I watched the process with amusement. Tom was tall enough and strong enough to rank as a man, and he was nearly eighteen; but he had hitherto always been a boy in his aversion to female society, and this sudden change marked more than anything else the growth of manhood within him. I watched him with pleasure and pride. His likeness to his father often struck me forcibly. It was increasing with every passing year.

"Mother," he said to me one day in his rather abrupt fashion, "Mother, ought we not to ask Mrs. Scrope's daughter here to see her at Christmas?"

This idea had once crossed my own mind; but I had not expected to hear my son advocate such a plan; rather I had looked for him to oppose it.

"Mrs. Scrope often talks about her," continued the lad, "and I know she would give anything to see her. Her friends are coming over very soon, and could bring her daughter. I think she ought to be with her mother again."

"I will think about it, Tom," I answered. "I must talk to Mrs. Scrope."

But I knew beforehand how the matter would end; and, before two days had passed, a letter was on its way to France.

Geraldine's joy in the prospect of reunion with her child was touching to see. She could not thank me enough for my goodness, and I was as pleased as she was. The heavy gloom seemed slowly lifting

from my heart and my home. I was no longer utterly alone. I had my cousin to think for, I had her to talk to, to cheer, and to confide in. My son was brighter than he had been since his father's death, and now, in the prospect of my two schoolboys' return, and the advent of the young cousin from France, this Christmastide, which had promised to be so dark, seemed likely to be a season of happiness and peace.

Geraldine had picked up wonderfully since her arrival, and there was something extremely captivating in her fragile beauty. The pallor and emaciation had passed off, leaving behind a delicacy of outline and coloring that was exquisitely lovely. It seemed to me that, even in the blush of her youthful beauty, Geraldine had never been so fair as now.

And yet my heart often ached as I looked at her. There was no rest in the brilliance of the eye, no peace in the expression of the features, no indication, that I ever saw, which spoke of inward hope or faith.

Since her arrival, Geraldine had never once spoken to me on religious subjects. Once when I had said something—I know not what—about the love of God being a help in trouble, she had said, almost sharply, "Surely, Kate, you have not gone and turned saint?"

I suppose something in my face told her that she

had hurt me, for she at once recalled the words, and never made a similar speech. Moreover, she attended family prayers, and read her Bible in the morning when I was with her; but she never said a word upon such matters, and avoided any discussion with me, if I approached the subject, by implicitly agreeing with all I said.

I was not happy or satisfied about her; but I was learning experience, and hesitated to make any advance. I was not responsible for her, as for my own children, and I knew that speech is often apt to do more harm than good.

Moreover, Geraldine was so sweet and attractive that it was hard to see a fault in her. More winning ways surely no woman ever possessed. My boys had not been twelve hours at home before they were the devoted slaves of "Aunt Geraldine," as she taught them to call her, and all three cavaliers vied with each other who was to do her most homage.

And a new excitement and attraction were at hand in the expected arrival of "Cousin Lelia," who was to make her appearance the very next day.

It would be quite like a family party, I told myself, and tried to still the aching pain at my heart when I thought of the one who had always been at my side each Christmastide for many long years, but who would be with me no more till I could join

him upon the other side of the dark river of death. I could still find happiness in the happiness of others; I told myself so again and again; and the one who was gone would be the first to tell me not to mourn as one without hope.

So I, too, tried to cast my sorrows aside, and to enter into the spirit of the joyous season; and this was all the easier to do after the arrival of the eagerly expected Lelia.

How shall I describe that most witching and fascinating of living creatures, who seemed to me to have dropped upon us from another world?

Lelia's beauty was of that peculiar dazzling kind most difficult to describe, yet most intensely apparent to every one about her. Her features were not faultless, her complexion was a little too dark for ideal beauty, and yet the radiant life that seemed to emanate from her, the shining brilliance of her glorious eyes, the ceaseless vivacity that surrounded her like an atmosphere, gave her a power and a magnetic attraction that I have never seen equalled.

She certainly had the most wonderful eyes, the whitest teeth, the sunniest smile that I have ever seen. Her grace and rapidity of movement were fawnlike in their unfettered freedom. Her laugh was like a peal of silver bells; her voice, with its pretty French accent, was music in itself. Altogether she was a wonderfully charming creature, this girl of seventeen, and she won all hearts at

Lydgate before she had been six hours within its walls.

A young girl was a novelty there. My little Ursula had died before she reached her maidenhood and Elizabeth was but a little toddler still. My boys flocked round this beautiful young thing, completely fascinated by her charms, and she was equally pleased to be entertained by them, and queened it over them with a serene sense of power that was amusing to witness.

The freedom of my family life was much appreciated by one brought up to a more formal code, and our Christmas passed with a joyousness that once I should have deemed impossible.

I think mine was the only sad heart in all the company, for Tom seemed to have forgotten his grief in the fascinations of these new relatives; and Geraldine, comforted by the presence of her child, ceased to dwell on the troubles of her married life.

Mr. Scrope made no attempt to recall his wife. She wrote to him, at my instigation, to say where she was, and to tell him that she proposed paying a long visit to her cousin, Mrs. Baskerville. He wrote back a few lines, saying that she was welcome to please herself as to her future arrangements; but not a word did he vouchsafe as to any provision for either wife or child. He seemed practically to wish to rid himself of them both.

This correspondence opened my eyes rather more fully to the bearing of my own act, in openly embracing my cousin's cause, and offering to share my home with her. I did not regret my course of action. I did not see that I could have done otherwise; but this plain intimation on the part of her husband, that he wished to see her no more, showed me that I had undertaken a rather serious responsibility.

She was too proud to insist that her husband should make her an allowance, and I was as resolute as herself upon this point, for my pride of race was likewise stirred. She had no kindred to help her, save myself, and it became evident that the promise I had made of shelter and protection would have to be indefinitely extended.

I was pleased to help and comfort Geraldine in her sorrow. I loved her, and I loved her beautiful daughter; but yet a certain nameless shrinking sometimes came over me when I thought of their being enrolled as permanent inmates of Lydgate.

For it very soon became self-evident that the asylum that I had offered to the mother must be shared by the daughter.

It was Tom who first openly broached this subject, and brought it before my notice

"Mother," he said one day, soon after the new year had come in, "don't you think Aunt Geraldine and Lelia ought to have their own suite of

apartments, and all that sort of thing? Lelia wants to go on with her harp and piano practice, and her painting and embroidery, and she ought to have a room of her own. Lydgate is quite large enough."

"Is Lelia not going back to France?" I asked, for I had not fully entered into the future arrangements respecting my young cousin.

"Oh, no!" Tom answered quickly, "those people are not going back, and she would hate to leave us now, she is so happy here. Besides, Aunt Geraldine is going to live here, so of course Lelia must too; there isn't any other way."

"No," I answered slowly, "I suppose not."

Tom looked rather vexed.

"You talk as if you did not like to have Lelia here," he said, with a curious gleam in his ey

"Not at all. I love Lelia dearly," I answered quietly; "but matters like these require too much thought to be treated lightly by us elders."

His face cleared a little.

"May I tell Lelia that she is to stay always?"

"Does she not know?"

"I'm not sure. She said she did not know what was going to become of her. Sometimes she is very sad for a little while, though she does seem so happy and bright. She has a great deal of feeling, though she does not always show it. She will be so glad that she is to stay here always."

This was a long speech for Tom to make, and I could not help smiling.

"Always is a long day," I answered. "Lelia would laugh to hear it applied to her stay here."

He turned round quickly.

"What do you mean, mother? You will not turn her out?"

"Certainly not. It is Lelia herself who will take flight some day."

His face expressed some strong emotion, which I took for mystification. Tom's wits were not renowned for sharpness, and I smiled inwardly as I hastened to make my meaning more plain.

"Lelia is very beautiful and attractive. People will soon find that out. Lelia will most likely be married before many years have passed."

Tom's face flushed suddenly crimson; he turned and walked away without a word, closing the door sharply behind him.

I sat lost in thought, suddenly startled by the conviction that my son was no longer a boy, but a man, and with all a man's troubles and joys rising up in his path. There was no mistaking that look upon his face. He had already looked upon Lelia as the woman he hoped in time to make his wife. I was as certain of it as if he had taken me into his confidence.

Strange to say, this possibility had never seriously occurred to me, even when I had pictured

Lelia as a frequent guest. Mothers are slow to realize the developement of their children, and Tom was not quite eighteen. But he was growing more the man month by month, and many lads fall under the influence of love's young dream before they are any older than my poor Tom.

I wished now that I could make different arrangements for Geraldine and Lelia; but I could not see my way at present to change my plans. Perhaps something in the future might be settled, but for a time matters must remain on their present footing.

I faced the question thoroughly, and failed to see any real reason why my son should not marry this cousin if they really loved one another.

After my own experiences of life, I was quite resolved not to stand in the way of a real and deep affection. I felt convinced that I could easily detect the true from the false, after the bitter lesson I had learnt, and I determined that no act of mine should ever stand between my children and their best and truest happiness.

Just as I had reached this point in my meditations my door was softly opened, and Lelia was kneeling at my feet.

"Ah, dear Aunt Kate! dear Aunt Kate!" she cried, her radiant face sparkling betwixt smiles and tears, "how very, very good you are to me! How can I ever thank you?"

"By being always a good and happy girl, my love," I answered; "and may we succeed in keeping you as happy as you have been heretofore!"

"You are so good to me," cried Lelia, kissing my hands in her pretty, effusive fashion. "Will you let me try to be a daughter to you, dear Aunt Kate? I never can thank you for all your goodness to us, but if ever I can be the least help or comfort to you—ah, you cannot guess how happy it would make me!"

I kissed and caressed the warm-hearted girl, and my anxious fears fled. If my boy must love and wed, could he find a lovelier or more gentle wife than our sweet Lelia?

And they were children still, and she had no thought for him beyond a cousinly affection. It was evident to me in every word and look, as we talked together, that no dim foreshadowing of the possible future lay across her path, as it did across that of my son. She was a child in heart and spirit, and I prayed that she might long continue so.

I held a serious consultation with Geraldine, who overwhelmed me with gratitude for thus extending my hospitality to her child, and we made definite arrangements for the accommodation of mother and daughter in a vacant wing, where they could enjoy a certain amount of independence and

freedom, whilst still feeling themselves members of the household.

Arrangements for finishing Lelia's education were made, as well as the seclusion of our house would permit, and under these auspices Mrs. Scrope and her only child took up their abode at Lydgate.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DIVIDED HOUSEHOLD.

AND what shall I say of the years that followed after the admission of these relatives as members of my household?

I find it difficult even now, after the long lapse of time, to see the full bearing of events, or to make out with any certainty how much was accident, and how much design, in what followed. I can but relate things as they appeared at the time, and try not to be unjust to any, or to condemn too hastily.

I hardly know how long it was before I began to awake to a sense of what was passing. I am not by nature of a suspicious or jealous temperament. My faults lie in a different direction. I think more than a year had passed, possibly even two, before I began to see that we were a divided household, and that I was not really the head.

How can I describe the state of things?—a state

which was nominally one thing, but really another. My authority was never openly disputed; but I frequently found that my son held different views from myself, and then, after a brief consultation, I often gave way to him, and allowed matters to be conducted according to his fancy. I was always wishful for him to assume the position of head of the house, and was perhaps disposed to give way to him a little more than was quite wise, in order that he should really feel that he did, in a measure, stand in his father's place.

But by gradual, slow degrees I began to see that it was not to Tom that I was giving way, but to my cousin Geraldine. She and her daughter exercised over Tom and his brothers an influence beyond what I was able to acquire, and at last I began to feel like one standing alone in the midst of a hostile camp, conscious that in some subtle, undefinable way everybody was against me—not ostensibly, but in a fashion almost harder to bear than open defiance.

I do not wish to think or speak harshly of Geraldine. I forgave her on her death-bed for the harm she then admitted having done, and I never think she fully understood the bearing of the influence she exerted over my boys. Even when she confessed to me, with tears and deep remorse, the treacherous part she had played, I do not think she was fully able to appreciate the pain he had given me.

Geraldine's master passion, from youth upwards, had been to rule, to subjugate, to win the hearts of all about her—that is, of all the men of her own rank in life. I do not say it unkindly. It was as much the fault of her training as of anything else, and she had no strong principle to enable her to conquer the faults of her nature.

She had now lived out the romance of her life, and had been cruelly treated at the hands of fortune; but suffering had not brought her to her Saviour's feet, and she still sought distraction in the old paths of pleasure so familiar to her.

She no longer, of course, sought to find lovers, and play with their hearts in her old, unthinking fashion, but she liked to feel her power over my three handsome lads, and she was pleased to find how easily they were won by her soft flatteries and injudicious praise, and how they one and all adored their beautiful cousin Lelia.

When the younger boys were at home Geraldine's boudoir was a sort of reception-room, where they were always to be found, unless they were attending Lelia in her walks or rides.

The girl grew more brilliantly beautiful every year, and I could not wonder that my sons were enamored of her society.

There was nothing to hurt them in all this, if matters had simply ended with their love towards

the so-called aunt and cousin; but there was more than that behind.

I began to find that in proportion as my boys sought the society of these relatives, so they grew indifferent towards me, and neglected me with an unconscious indifference that was sometimes almost more than I could bear.

But there was even worse to come; for I began to be aware at last that a sort of conspiracy was going on in the house, and a *régime* being instituted, from which I was purposely excluded.

I discovered quite by accident that regular card-playing was going on day by day in Geraldine's rooms, and that my boys were learning to gamble at her table, without a thought that there could be any harm in doing what Aunt Geraldine and Cousin Lelia approved.

My husband had seen enough of its dangers to be a very strict opponent of all sorts of play, and it had always been a rule in his house that no game should ever be played for any stake, however trifling.

Tom was quite old enough to remember this prohibition, even if the younger boys did not; and it was with a keen sense of pain that I found out what was going on around me.

I think it was this discovery that first roused me to the true state of my household. That play should have been going on regularly in my house

without my knowledge showed me that some amongst the players knew that they were acting wrongly, and that I was regarded with a certain mixture of awe and distrust, infinitely painful to experience.

But what startled me most was my utter inability to put a stop to what was going on. Geraldine laughed gayly, and fenced and argued with a facile fluency that disconcerted without convincing me. She *could* not be made to see that she had acted in any way treacherously or wrongly towards me and mine. She laughed more and more at the absurdity of such an idea. The poor dear boys were moped to death in this dull old house, she told me; in sheer charity she had been obliged to devise something to amuse them. And as for the formation of dangerous habits, Geraldine was more than ever amused at such a suggestion.

"My dear Kate," she said, in her patronizing way, which I confess I found very trying to submit to, "you are very good—rather too good to bring up a family of boys—but you are not very wise, and you know about as much of the world as your little Elizabeth does. If you think high-spirited boys like yours will be tied all their life long to your apron-strings, or be fettered in their ways of thinking by their father's prejudices, you are greatly mistaken. They will think for themselves, and act for themselves, whether you like it

or not; and you have more reason to thank me for giving them elementary lessons in some of the ways of the world than to blame me for teaching them what you so despise. The training I am giving them will save them from much trouble and loss at the hands of card-sharpers and clever players. I will turn them out fit to hold their own in any company. You home-bred mothers do not think of that. You send your boys out as lambs in the midst of wolves, and then wonder to see them devoured. You should give them the wolf's skin, fair cousin, and then you would see them let alone."

The sophistry of this argument, and the cool tone of superiority, angered me greatly; but I had learnt control of myself in those days, and I knew better than to injure my cause by hasty words. My husband had taught me to pray silently for help in such moments as these, and after a brief struggle I was able to answer calmly:

"What I have striven to give my boys is the armor of God—that, and that only, will save them from the weapons of the enemy. You know best, Geraldine, whether you have helped or hindered me in my attempt to teach them where alone can true strength be found."

Geraldine laughed constrainedly.

"My dear cousin, we all know that you are painfully *dévote*, as Lelia calls it, and we respect you

for it; but we cannot all emulate you in your pursuit of holiness. I never was religious save at odd moments, and Lelia takes after me. As for your boys, they are perfectly delightful, and as good as ever they need be; but as for looking for religious fervor in them at their age!—they are very good boys in their way, but it is ridiculous to expect them to be youthful saints. They would be good for nothing if they were. It is all very well to go in for that sort of thing later, but it is absurd and offensive at their time of life."

That was the substance of what I gleaned from my cousin. My boys were even harder to deal with. They sheltered themselves behind the axioms laid down by "Aunt Geraldine," quoted her as an oracle, took it for granted that all she taught must be right; and finally, on my making some appeal to their sense of obedience, Arthur turned upon me with a sort of boyish insolence and asked—

"How can we tell who is right? You say one thing and Aunt Geraldine says another. You can't both be right. Aunt Geraldine has seen a great deal more of life than you have—you have often said so yourself; why should you be right and she be wrong? Isn't it quite as likely to be the other way?"

Argument was useless, and my authority was not regarded. I do not say that I *could* not have

stopped what was going on if I had made a determined effort to do so; but I saw that matters had got beyond me, and that obedience to the letter would but strengthen the opposition in spirit. Very bitterly did I feel my loneliness and weakness, and only in deep and earnest prayer for myself and my children could I find any help and comfort in my distress and anguish of spirit.

And just in my hour of sorest need I did receive a portion of the human help and sympathy which I so sadly craved.

One day, just at this time, I was told that a gentleman, who had not given his name, was waiting to see me in the drawing-room.

I went down, and found myself face to face with my old friend Captain (now Colonel) Lyon.

We were both changed—both aged. His hair, like mine, was growing gray, and the wrinkles on his weather-beaten face gave him the appearance of being older than he was; but his genial nature had not been warped by any of the reverses he had suffered, and his warm-hearted greeting brought me no little comfort.

He had sought me out for many causes. He had a great wish to see me again, and to offer his condolences for the losses I had suffered in my family, of which he had heard from time to time; and more especially he had come to tell me that he had just exchanged commands with a brother officer,

and was now the colonel of the regiment Harold was just about to enter, and he wished to assure me that he would have a special eye to the welfare of the lad.

This was an immense relief to me, for Harold was the boy about whom I was most anxious. He was so high-spirited and self-willed that I had never had much control over him, and his handsome face and dashing air were likely to give him a dangerous popularity wherever he went.

Colonel Lyon was staying in the neighborhood, and we saw a good deal of him. His genial ways and hearty manner won the affection of the boys very quickly, and Harold especially became much attached to him, and followed him about whenever he could do so, talking of his future prospects and the career that lay before him in the army.

This friendship gave me much satisfaction, and the Colonel and I became very intimate as the days passed on, and old ties seemed renewed.

I told him a good deal of my past life, and one day, in a moment of unusual confidence, I talked to him of the boys, and of the anxiety I suffered on their accoun[t]. I could not tell all the tale. I could not speak of the influence exerted by Geraldine in a direction contrary to my wishes, but I could impart to him a great deal, and his own shrewd observation had mastered more than I then knew.

"My dear madam," he answered me, pulling the

long gray mustache that in those days was distinctively military, "your position is a trying one—I have seen it. I always think it a hard thing for a mother to be left with a family of sons growing up, without a father's strong hand over them. But believe me, Mrs. Baskerville, those lads of yours—and I have studied them somewhat closely—are very good, warm-hearted lads; they love you far better than you know, and one of these days, when the stage of boyish reserve and shyness has passed, and when occasion calls for it, they will show a wealth of love which will quite surprise you."

The tears started to my eyes at the sound of these welcome words. My friend looked away, and continued:

"They seem to you to lavish all their affections on Mrs. Scrope, who spoils and flatters them. It is true that they find her room a very agreeable place of resort, and her honeyed words very sweet; but do they really give her the respect that they have for their mother? Not a bit of it! Those boys are at the *restive* age, as I call it. They chafe at the bit, and seem to rebel against the hand that holds the reins. But go down deeper than appearances, and look into their hearts. What do you find there? Why, a very loyal love and respect for the very parent against whose quiet authority they seem to chafe so vehemently. Madam, I

have talked to all those boys. They have told me more than they knew. They have a deeper reverence for the quiet mother, who has been as father and mother both, ever since their father's death, than they are at all aware of. One soon finds out so much, when a little talk brings out the real nature of their thoughts, and not the little surface angularities and roughnesses."

I wiped my tears away, and answered:

"You are very good, Colonel Lyon, to give me such comfort."

"Tut! tut! my dear madam, you must not give way to despondency. Don't you know what contrary young rascals lads are from boyhood to manhood? You never had any brothers, so preliminary experience was lacking in your case; but I do assure you that it is a way with boys to show themselves at their very worst to those whom they really love the best. It is an odd development of the contrariety natural to man; but I can prophesy without any misgivings that in the case of your sons, their esteem and love lie beneath the surface, and only require wakening into activity by the exigencies of life."

So Colonel Lyon strengthened and comforted me, and I thanked God for sending this friend just when I stood so much in need of encouragement.

I took heart again, and went quietly on my way, and did not allow myself to be discouraged by the

outward lack of affection on the part of my sons. When inclined to be despondent, I recalled with a thrill of pleasure the Colonel's parting words:

"When good seed has been sown steadily by a mother's hand, watered by her tears, and fertilized by her prayers, be sure that it will spring up into life before very many years pass away. Do not be discouraged if outward signs of growth be wanting. Possibly this may be caused by the deeper striking downwards of the roots. The harvest may be the more abundant for the very slowness of germination in the seed."

So I took courage and waited, and I did not allow myself to show by look or word the pain I oft-times suffered. I prayed unceasingly for all the members of my household, and I tried to drive doubt and despondency from my heart.

My little twin children were my sweetest treasures. Nothing shook their intense allegiance to me. They loved their beautiful Aunt Geraldine, and the brilliant, sparkling Lelia; but their baby hearts were all mine, and I derived an intense happiness from instilling in these tender natures the teaching that I had never bestowed in former times upon my little ones.

These twins much resembled one another, and they were more like Ursula than any of my other children had been. Little Elizabeth, with her earnest eyes and baby thoughtfulness, often made

me think of the sister she only knew by name; and both these children, from being so much with me perhaps, showed an early devotion and piety which was very precious to my lonely heart.

Geraldine called them "dreadful children," and declared I should pray them into an early grave, if I made them so unnaturally good; but I failed to see anything unnatural in them. They were a rosy, merry pair, as fond of play as a couple of kittens, and giving way to an ecstasy of mirth when rolling over and over upon the nursery rug. But Geraldine never visited the nursery. She was not fond of babies, and she seldom saw them except at bed-time, when they were brought to me in their little dressing-gowns to say good-night, and to lisp their little prayers at my knee.

Geraldine was sometimes in my room at this hour, and would affect a sort of dismay at the questions which occasionally the baby lips would propound; but I saw nothing strange or unnatural in them, and in our divided household my darling little children were my deepest source of delight.

If we had no such moments of refreshment, life would be but a sad pilgrimage. Never a day passed but that I thanked God, with full heart, for giving me my little twin children to train up for Him, and prayed that I might do it aright.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHANGES.

SOME people may wonder, perhaps, why my cousin Geraldine still remained a member of my household, after what I have related in the previous chapter.

I did suffer many misgivings on the subject, but I remembered the promise I had made, and felt unable to turn her, homeless, into a cold world, at whose hands she had already endured much misery. Besides this, my boys were very little at home just now, except Tom, and I knew quite well by this time that banishing Geraldine and Lelia would never keep him away from them. He would only resent the affront most bitterly, and make himself their champion. Such a step would rather increase than lessen their influence upon him, whilst it would inevitably raise a barrier between his mother and himself.

Moreover, Tom was developing interests in other directions. He had been to London a year or two back, to witness the young queen's coronation, and he had repeated his visit each year since, and was now full of talk about the royal marriage which had lately been celebrated. He was beginning to take an active interest in politics, and sometimes expressed a hope that he might some day sit in Parliament. I was always glad to hear him talk in this vein, and encouraged him in those studies which occupied his mind in any healthy fashion, and kept him a little out of the way of his fascinating cousin Lelia.

For my heart often ached for my boy in those days. I could see that Lelia was to him his very star and light of life. Each month that passed found him more and more subdued by the beauty and witchery of the lovely girl; each day seemed to rivet his bonds more firmly.

To me, I must confess, the charm of Lelia's face did not increase with increasing familiarity, nor did her ever-flowing vivacity altogether please or satisfy me. I wearied sometimes of the perpetual silvery laugh, the never-ceasing flow of words, and the childish fits of petulance and temper, more assumed than real, by which Lelia teased my poor boy occasionally almost to desperation.

I saw so very well that what was the deepest earnest with him was but play to her. She could

not in the least understand a nature like his. There were depths beneath Tom's somewhat heavy exterior that her brilliant wit could never fathom. She laughed at his boyish awkwardness, little knowing how greatly her superior he really was; and I was perfectly well aware that the love so deeply implanted in his nature found no smallest response in hers. She liked him, and in our solitary life he amused her, and was useful to her; but as for any deeper feeling, I was certain it did not exist.

In due course Tom came of age, and his majority was celebrated at the Mount, with a good deal of display and merry-making. We all migrated there for a time, and enjoyed the change; for the house had been let ever since my husband's death, and I had not even seen it for several years.

Geraldine and Lelia came with us. Harold joined us, and could not say enough in praise of the soldier's life upon which he had lately entered, nor of Colonel Lyon's judicious kindness to him. Harold was much improved by his year of military discipline, and treated me with an affection and respect very different from anything I had been used to from my high-spirited boys. Perhaps his colonel's influence might be traced in this, but at any rate the change was very welcome.

Arthur, my clever boy, was still at school, winning his laurels there very fast, and bent on going

to Oxford, as soon as ever he should be of suitable age. He meant to get a Balliol Scholarship, if possible, and did so a little later. He came home for a few days to celebrate his brother's majority; and both he and Harold were so tall, and handsome, and manly, that it was difficult to believe how young they still were in reality.

We had a very gay time, which I need not describe, and then, after a few days' festivity, our guests left us, and we settled down to spend the summer at the Mount—now my son's inheritance, and of which he assumed complete control.

I was pleased to see the manly and self-reliant way in which he accepted the responsibilities of the position, without bravado or ostentation, and equally without fear or faltering.

He made himself master of all the details of the property, and was soon respected and obeyed by every one upon the place. He grew more like his father each year, I thought, and I watched him with pride and pleasure, mingled with a sense of sorrow that my husband could not see how well he filled his position.

His manner towards me, in his own house, was more considerate and attentive than of old. He began to show some small indications of a wish to be more to me than he had been, and each of these indications, however awkwardly advanced, was hailed both with joy and thankfulness.

But there were developments in other directions that gave me much anxiety. The way in which he consulted Lelia as to every proposed change in house or grounds, and the readiness with which she gave advice, seemed to indicate a mutual understanding beyond the mere ostensible cousinship. I fancied, too, that Geraldine looked on with complacency at this intimacy, and settled herself down at the Mount almost as if she looked upon it as a home.

Poor Geraldine! Why should I blame her if she did countenance a marriage which should give her a settled and comfortable home? Living in a measure upon a cousin's charity could not be an enviable existence.

I was not in any way set against a marriage between Lelia and Tom. I had faced that possibility for long, and had made up my mind to allow the young people to settle matters for themselves; but what I did greatly dread was an unequal match, with devoted love on one side, and on the other only a cool liking, combined with desire for a wealth and position.

I had married without love, and had given much pain to my husband. Was Tom destined to meet a similar fate? And would Lelia ever learn to love him, as I had learnt to love my husband? Sometimes I feared that hers was one of those natures to which a deep love was impossible; but

I tried not to judge. Might not the same have been said of me at her age?

But whilst I was every week expecting to hear of an engagement, a new phase came over our affairs, and changed their current not a little.

One day, to my great surprise, I was told that Henry Scrope had arrived at the Mount an hour before, and was waiting to know if I would grant him an audience. Neither Mrs. Scrope nor her daughter were aware of his proximity. He wished it kept a secret.

I had not seen Henry Scrope for more than twenty years, and I could not imagine what his errand could be; but, as it might be for Geraldine's good, I consented to see him, in the small drawing-room reserved to my use.

In five minutes he made his entrance. He had not aged very much in appearance. He was still a handsome man, with an elegance of figure and dress not easily rivalled. But his face was undoubtedly the face of a dissipated, hard-living man. The bold eyes had an insolence in their glance which had become fixed there, beyond the power of remedy. Lines furrowed the face that had not been traced by thought or study. Henry Scrope looked what he was, a selfish, self-indulgent, reckless man, who lived only for pleasure, and cared only for the things of this present life.

His first words showed a callous insolence which startled me not a little.

"Jove—Kate!" he exclaimed on seeing me, "why, you're handsomer than ever!"

I stopped short at hearing myself thus addressed, and did *not* give him my hand, as I had at first intended. I bowed coldly, shuddering inwardly at the thought—"That man might have been my husband!"

"I believe, Mr. Scrope, that you wished to see me," I said coldly.

My tone seemed to recall him to himself. He pulled himself up and replied with more propriety of manner:

"I did, Mrs. Baskerville. I came to request your good offices between me and my wife. I believe Geraldine is with you still."

I bent my head in assent.

"And Lelia too?"

"Yes."

"And is she a beauty? I have heard that she combines in her person all the graces of father and mother. Gad! She must be worth looking at if that is the case!"

"Lelia is very handsome," I answered coldly.

He stopped short and said suddenly, and in a different tone, "My son by my first wife is dead. Did you know?"

"No, I had not heard."

"I have known for years he could not live. He had an incurable malady, and I always hoped Geraldine would give me a son; but she did not. Lelia, however, can inherit my property. I think it is time we were reconciled."

"And you wish me to say this to Geraldine?"

"Yes. Tell her I am tired of living alone, and that it's ridiculous going on like this. We're growing old now, and shall not be quite so peppery. I'm willing to admit my faults, if she'll be equally frank. She can't like living on charity forever. Tell her she'd better see me, and try if we can't make some amicable arrangement between us."

"I will tell Geraldine that you are here, and ask her if it will be agreeable to her to see you," I answered.

He laughed sardonically.

"Now don't you go and try to set her against me, my good madam; I am sure you must see what an undesirable thing it is for husband and wife to live at variance. If you are as religious as is said, you ought to be delighted at this opportunity of turning peace-maker."

His tone angered me. There was an insolent familiarity about his manner very repellant. In my secret heart I pitied Geraldine deeply. I know that duty might point towards a reconciliation; but what a husband that man would make!

What ought I do or say, or to refrain from saying, on such a subject?

"You shall arrange matters yourself with Geraldine, if she will see you," I answered coldly. "I never interfere between husband and wife."

As I turned to leave the room I heard a short, insolent laugh and muttered words:

"Gad! if she isn't jealous of me still!"

I subdued my indignation as well as I could, and went to find my cousin. I expected that my news would cause her much trouble and disturbance of mind, and that she would find it a difficult matter to bring herself to face the husband from whose home she had been compelled to flee; but, instead of that, the moment she heard that he was in the house, she sprang up and ran to the nearest mirror.

"Henry here! Dear me, how very amusing! So I have brought him to his bearings at last, have I? How do I look? Yes, I certainly have very much improved since I came to you. This new style of hair-dressing improves me; and I like this dress better than any I have. I will go down at once. Just fancy Henry's having been the first to make the advance! I shall be able to ride the high horse now!"

Geraldine had gone even before she had finished speaking, and I was left alone, decidedly aghast at the rapidity with which events were moving.

Poor flighty Geraldine! Impressions were but transient with her. The deepest that had ever been made—that of her husband's faithless cruelty—had not lasted long; and now she was ready to forget all, in the pleasure of a little excitement and novelty. Glad as I was, in many ways, that husband and wife should be reconciled, I could not but wish that there should be at least real sorrow—true repentance on the one side, and Christian forgiveness on the other—that the arrangement should be brought about by other influences than any that I had seen at work so far. If there had been good cause for this long separation—as I feared there had—there should be more to be said than anything Henry Scrope seemed likely to say, before his wife and daughter could well consent to live once more under his roof.

Some such thoughts as these found their way into my mind, as I waited to learn the result of the interview going on downstairs. I hoped I was not uncharitable; but I could not trust Henry Scrope.

I had not to wait very long in doubt. Geraldine came running back shortly, her face quite aglow with pleasurable excitement.

"Oh, yes, it is all right. We have made it up; and Henry is going to take us home to-morrow. Lelia is with him, and he is charmed with her. There will be no more trouble now, and we do not

mean to have any more quarrels. We are both tired to death of living in this way. I don't mean anything ungrateful to you, dearest Kate; but of course one's home and one's husband must come first, and we are going to turn over a new leaf. Henry really can be very nice when he likes, and he is quite handsome and young-looking still. He says I am the same, and there is no reason why we should not be very happy together."

"I hope not," I answered, adding, after a moment's hesitation, "You told me, when you came here, that the company your husband kept was not fit for Lelia to see or mix in. Have you ascertained, before taking her back, that matters will be improved in that respect?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Geraldine, quickly. "Henry says he really can't afford to keep such an establishment as before, and entertain so much; besides, he found it did not answer in the long-run to be so careless of the reputation of his house. We are going to live quite soberly now, and give up all Henry's wild friends, and settle down in better style altogether."

I suppose I still looked grave, for this careless talk struck me somewhat painfully.

"Don't be afraid for Lelia," she said. "I shall take good care of her. Besides, she will never be long with us. She is sure to marry quickly. Indeed, that is part of the plan."

"What plan?"

"Oh, the whole thing for getting Henry reinstated as one of the leading and respected men of the county. We have several aristocratic families round, and several unmarried eldest sons. I always set my heart on making a good match for Lelia."

I suppose my face must have betrayed some of my feelings, for Geraldine continued quickly:

"Of course, I am sorry for poor Tom; but you know a boy must go through it, like measles, and the younger they take it the better. He will soon get over it, and of course I must do my best for Lelia—it is a mother's first duty."

I commanded my voice to say quietly:

"I fancied you were more in favor of Tom's evident views than I was myself. You have always seemed to me to encourage him."

Geraldine laughed lightly.

"Circumstances alter cases, my good Kate. So long as I was situated in my past awkward position, and my poor child so cramped in her chance of all choice, I was glad enough to secure for her so good a match as your son. But you must of course be aware that poor, dear Tom is no fit mate for my matchless Lelia. He is a good, steady lad as ever breathed, but such a clod! Of course, my plain duty, as her mother, is to give her such opportunities as I can."

Human nature is sadly contrary. I did not think that a marriage between Lelia and Tom would prove happy; and yet my heart rose in revolt when I heard Geraldine's words. Yet I saw it was hopeless to reason with her, or even to say a single word of remonstrance. She was acting according to the dictates of her nature. She did not in the least appreciate how sordid and mean her actions and purposes seemed to others. She took a perfectly different standpoint from mine on all such questions, and I knew by long experience that argument was useless.

It is one of the hardest lessons of life, learning to tolerate in others views that we ourselves know or think to be utterly wrong. The young cannot do it. They must argue and fight and perhaps quarrel hopelessly, but they cannot agree to differ. Life teaches us that hard lesson, and as we increase in wisdom, we learn to give up trying to rule the world by our own theories, and endeavor to bring good out of evil wherever we can; but in those cases where we are helpless to mend matters, then we quietly let them alone, and try to think kindly and charitably of people who will not and cannot look at life as we do.

So Geraldine and I parted as friends. We had stood the test of constant intercourse for several years in somewhat exceptional circumstances, and had not grown cold towards one another, in spite

of great differences of thought and feeling. We parted with affection on both sides, and I was able without insincerity to say that I should miss mother and daughter somewhat sadly from my daily life.

I was most afraid, however, for Tom; and his cheerful serenity surprised and puzzled me.

As we sat together alone in the large room upon the first evening after the departure of our guests, I could not forbear asking:

"Will you not miss Lelia very much?"

"Of course I shall," he answered readily. "I miss her every hour of the day; but then it will not be for very long, and that helps me."

"What do you mean, Tom? I do not understand."

"I mean that she will soon be back, and so I can wait patiently."

"Do you mean that Lelia will come back to live with us again?"

"I mean that I shall soon bring her to the Mount as my wife," answered Tom, proudly. "As soon as ever I am a little older I shall claim her, and until that time we shall have letters to live upon."

He looked so confident that I was staggered for a moment.

"Do you mean, Tom, that you and Lelia are already engaged?"

"I do not exactly think it amounts to that, but

it is really the same thing. She has promised to write and never to forget me, and she knows that I love her with all my heart, and mean soon to marry her. I have told her so often, and she always seemed pleased. Oh, yes, mother, we have understood one another for a long time, and very soon I shall bring Lelia back as my wife."

CHAPTER XIX.

TOM'S FIRST LOVE.

THIS hope was the mainspring of my Tom's life, and buoyed him up during the first three months that followed Lelia's departure.

He was not asked to visit his relatives, as he evidently half expected, but he wrote steadily and regularly to Lelia, long epistles, telling all about himself, his life, and his love, and receiving in reply flimsy little letters, scented notes all froth and flippancy—rather like their author—which my poor boy treasured as priceless gems, and kept literally and figuratively next his heart.

I did what I could to cool his ardor, and break the blow which I knew would fall sooner or later. I could not repeat in full Geraldine's heartless words; but I warned him that Lelia's position having somewhat changed, her mother's views might modify, and that the girl herself might feel

differently disposed, now that a wider life had opened around her.

But my poor Tom was too simple-minded to grasp at these subtleties. He could not understand a nature like Lelia's. He fancied every one as open and straightforward as himself, and could never believe that any one would deliberately trifle with the heart of another, or raise hopes that were not destined to be fulfilled.

Do what I would, I could not weaken his faith in Lelia or her mother; indeed, he grew vexed with me for my inability to share his bright hopes, and withdrew the little confidences he had begun to entrust to me. I saw that if I persisted in my endeavors to open his eyes, I stood in danger of alienating his love from me.

So all I could do was to wait with what patience I could, and hope that time and absence would break the force of the blow.

Nothing discouraged honest Tom, neither the long intervals between Lelia's letters, nor their brevity when they did arrive. He had a hundred reasons to account for this—but never the true one.

He was somewhat lacking in imagination, and could not estimate the influence of a new life upon a nature like Lelia's. I could plainly see her now —a brilliant, beautiful young girl, leading a gay life, surrounded by gallant and dashing admirers, and lovers of wealth. Was it likely she would

think of the honest heart she had left behind? Was it even to be expected that Tom's image should still haunt her fancy? She had never given him anything beyond a cool, cousinly affection, even when they had been thrown so much together. Was it likely that this sentiment would quicken into ardent love now that all personal influence was withdrawn?

I could not blame Lelia, whatever happened. There was no engagement—even sanguine Tom admitted so much, and she had but accepted a devotion which it was almost impossible to refuse. Yet I did wish that she would now be a little more frank, and tell my poor boy plainly that whatever existed between them must end. The continuance of the correspondence was very bad for Tom, and could only make the disappointment the more bitter, when at last the inevitable blow should fall.

After a time Lelia's little scented notes ceased altogether, and Tom began to grow restless.

Geraldine was not a good correspondent, but she wrote to me from time to time to tell me how gay and happy a life she was leading, and how entirely the breach between her and her husband was healed. She mentioned incidentally how much admiration Lelia won, but she did not speak for some time of any possibility of her marriage. Every letter I opened in some fear for its contents, but the expected tidings came not.

The evil day, however, was but postponed. It dawned in due course.

We were at the Mount again, and Tom had passed his twenty-second birthday. He had said to me upon that day that he intended going to see Lelia shortly, engaging himself to her formally, and fixing his wedding for his twenty-third birthday. I had gently reminded him that he might find Lelia of a different way of thinking, but he had smiled confidently, and had told me that nothing could make him doubt her; if she had changed her mind, she would be sure to have told him.

Geraldine's letter, therefore, came with a shock of surprise to him, if not to me.

It contained, first, a good deal of social and domestic gossip, leading up as it were to the final climax.

"Well, mother, what does Aunt Geraldine say? Does she invite me to go and see Lelia?"

I looked up, not knowing what to answer. How could I tell him that he was asked to Lelia's wedding?

I suppose my face puzzled him, for his changed visibly.

'What is it, mother?" he asked.

"Tom, my dear boy, can you be strong, and meet a disappointment bravely?"

He grew very pale.

"Is it about Lelia?" he asked.

"It is about Lelia. Do you remember what I have sometimes said to you?"

He looked in my face in a sort of dumb despair.

"Tell me all."

I knew that it was no kindness to keep him longer in suspense.

"Lelia is going to be married next month."

"To whom?"

"To Mr. Carrisford."

Tom's lip quivered a little.

"He was at school with me. He was three years older than I. Is that the fellow Lelia chooses for her husband?"

"He is well spoken of," I answered gently. "We must hope she will be happy."

Tom sat quite still, brooding in a way I did not like to see.

"I must see her first," he said at length.

I rose and laid my hands upon his shoulders:

"My dear, dear boy, be advised by me. Do not give yourself such needless pain."

"I must," he answered. "I cannot rest without. They may be forcing her into this against her will."

My heart felt very full of compassion.

"Do you really think that, my poor Tom? Read your aunt's letter, and judge for yourself."

He took it and read it, and looked up at me with haggard eyes.

"I must go and see her," he reiterated; "I cannot trust what Aunt Geraldine says. I must see my Lelia, and hear it from her own lips."

"It will be needless pain," I could not refrain from saying.

"No," he answered, "I cannot act otherwise. I *cannot* believe she is a free agent. I must see her and speak to her, and assure myself that she is happy, and then I will come back—and—and—try to forget her. But if—" and here a sudden, fierce, determined light sprang up in his eyes, "if I find that they are putting stress upon her—forcing her to marry this man, whilst her heart is mine, then I shall carry her straight off home to you, mother, and marry her in defiance of them all. You will receive her, will you not, if I bring her to you thus? I may tell my poor darling that you will be a mother to her? She will be safe with you, will she not, till I can make her my wife?"

The light of sudden hope was in my boy's eyes. I felt very sad for him.

"You may rely on me, my son; but do not build upon this false hope. It will only buoy you up and then sink you the more deeply,"

But he would not be warned.

"You do not know Lelia, mother. I must go to my Lelia."

And he went.

He was only gone two days. I heard no word

from him during his brief absence, nor did I expect to do so. On the evening of the second day, as I was sitting alone in the twilight, the door opened and Tom came in.

He walked across the room in silence, knelt down before me, and laid his head in my lap, without speaking a single word.

I knew what that silence betokened, and my heart was too full to speak. I caressed my boy's dark head, and my heart went out in prayer to God that He would comfort the young man in this his first great trouble, and that it might be made a blessing to him by leading him to fix his heart on higher things.

At last Tom spoke.

"Mother," he said hoarsely, "it is all over now. You were right. She never loved me."

"My poor, dear boy!"

I think my silent sympathy quieted him. He had been trembling all over when first he knelt before me; now he was still, but he did not lift his head.

"I did not understand," he went on in a choked voice, "and I would not be told. It was all play to her—but it is death to me."

"It seems so now, dear boy," I answered; "but by-and-by you will see things differently."

"No," he answered, steadily and resolutely; "it has been my death-blow."

I did not argue or combat his view of the case.

I understood too well the misery that he was now enduring.

"I do not mean that I shall die," went on Tom, slowly and laboriously. "Would that I could! But I have lost all that made life worth living."

"Not quite, Tom, not quite," I answered gently; and after a pause he lifted his head, and looked at me with sunken, haggard eyes.

"What have I left?" he asked hoarsely; and I took his face between my hands, as I had not done since he was a little boy, and answered:

"You have much left, I hope, my son; the honor of your father's name to uphold, and your life to live bravely, before God and man."

He looked at me sadly, and his head went down again.

"I have no strength or purpose left. In losing her I lose all."

"It seems so now—it *is* so now, perhaps—but strength will come back to you in time, my dear boy. I think I need not tell your father's son where the best help and comfort are to be found."

Something between a sob and a groan broke from Tom's lips.

"It is all gone—all gone!" he murmured. "I have grown so careless since father died. I seem to have lost hold of everything."

"You can regain what you have lost," I answered. "The door is never shut."

"But the door of my heart is shut and locked, and Lelia's image is all its holds. I have made an idol of her all these years, and even now I cannot displace it."

"Perhaps that is why God displaced it," I answered tenderly, yet with some firmness. "He cannot readily submit to the desecration of the shrine once consecrated to Him."

Tom looked up quickly. It was growing dark, and I could hardly read the expression of his face, but I felt I had roused him. I felt that he had been struck by my words. Perhaps there had been more truth in them than even I had known. Had the shrine been consecrated once to the service of God, and after that given over to the worship of a fellow-creature?

"Can love be wrong?" questioned Tom. "Has not God given us leave—nay, rather commanded us—to love one another? Does He ever limit the love a man should bestow upon his wife, or upon her whom he would make his wife? Does he ever say, 'Thus far, and no farther'?"

"No," I answered quietly, "God lays no limit upon such a love as that."

His eyes sought mine with questioning glance.

"Then what is wrong? Why do you speak as if I had loved Lelia too much?"

"I never said you had loved her too much," I answered, "save for your own peace of mind.

What you have done has been to love God too little."

"Explain."

"My dear boy, can you not see? God must be *first*, that is all. We must love Him most—love Him above all else in the world; and when we do that, no depth or intensity of love need be feared. He only claims the altar of our hearts. That must be consecrated to Him. When that is done we need not fear to love with all the fervor of our nature, for no such secondary love can be idolatry. The love of God purifies it and makes it holy. There is no limit to our earthly love; we may love as we will—God it is who gives us such power to love—only our first love must be for Him."

A long silence followed my words, and then Tom asked:

"Is such a thing possible?"

"God can make it possible."

He lifted himself up and kissed me.

"Pray that it may be possible for me then, mother." And with that he left me.

Tom did not escape with impunity from the effects of this shock, combined as it had been in his case by sleeplessness, fasting and the fatigues of travelling.

For the first time in his life the boy was really ill, and for two or three days some sort of fever seemed to threaten him.

Nothing, however, developed in the end, and the attack passed off, leaving behind it no ill effects, save a temporary prostration of strength.

Those days of illness were very precious ones for me. Weakness and mental suffering seemed to break down that barrier of reserve that had always existed between me and my first-born, and Tom spoke freely of the inmost thoughts of his heart.

My quiet eldest son, who had been called heavy, stolid, and many other similar names, had had an unseen history of his own, little guessed at by those who lived nearest to him. I heard it all then, and marvelled at the self-contained comprehension of the boy.

My heart often smote me as I listened to his tale. He had loved and adored his "beautiful young mother" (as he called me), and I had given him so little or no notice. He had longed passionately to be like Lovel, to win my notice and approval, and I had not the least idea that he cared one iota for me. Love like that, repressed and discouraged, is apt to turn sour, and thus had it been with Tom. As he grew older he began to observe, and to criticise, and to notice that his father was not treated by me as the head of the house should be. The immediate cause of Lovel's death was known to him, and it hardened his heart against me. He knew how much sorrow his

father suffered in the loss of his son, and he could not forget that I had been the cause of that loss.

His honor and love toward his father were the strongest fibres of his nature; and the death of that father some years later had given him a blow from which he had never recovered.

It was from his father that he had derived all his religious feelings. He had earnestly striven in all things to be like him, and had eagerly endeavored to follow in his footsteps, and to emulate the steadfast trust in God which was so characteristic of my dead husband.

But when the lad was only sixteen, his father had been taken away, and the blow had seemed to produce a strange and numbing effect upon him, paralyzing his every effort to rise superior to it. He had rebelled in heart against God; he could not turn for consolation to the mother he had learnt to distrust, and for a time his spiritual life seemed dead within him.

Then my cousin and Lelia had appeared upon the scene, and from that moment a new life and purpose had awakened within him, and he had had few thoughts or feelings which were unconnected with his intense and growing love for the brilliant girl he had hoped soon to make his wife.

Geraldine and Lelia had no sympathy with any aspirations towards a higher and holier life. They had made game of my attempts to teach my boys

to live for another world, as well as for this, and Tom had listened and been led away against his better judgment, carried whither he would not by the charm exercised upon him by Lelia's beauty.

And now?

Now all this was changed. Conscience had awakened from her enforced stupor, and the noble soul which had been allowed to slumber was rousing itself to battle.

After years of carelessness, after deliberate choice of evil rather than good, the fight is always hard and long.

Tom would sometimes turn his wistful glance upon me, saying:

"Mother, I do believe—I believe in God as my Father, in Christ as my Redeemer; I repent of my sins, I most earnestly desire to live a new life. Faith I have, and love I have; but the old sense of peace will not come to me. It seems as if I had cast it away, and could not win it back again."

How well I knew that feeling!—that sense of desolation which at times no earnestness or faith seems able to lighten. What is it that brings that peace and comfort, that perfect, restful trust?

"My boy," I said to him sometimes, "pray for the guidance of God's Spirit. We cannot do without that. Pray Him to breathe into your heart that Spirit of truth and light which will

make your nature at one with His. 'God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.' It is Christ who redeemed us and made us children of God instead of servants; but it is the Holy Ghost who regenerates our sinful natures, and brings them, so far as may be, into unity with our Father's. My dear boy, peace will come to you if you will open your heart to the influence of the Spirit of God."

And it came at last. I prayed for my boy, and he prayed for himself. Deep and humble repentance was the foundation, and the rest followed—submission to God's will, then a sense of pardon, last of all, the peace that passeth understanding.

Those were happy days for me. Again I was to learn—this time in gratitude and joy—that we do reap, if we sow, and faint not. It was ten years before my prayers for my eldest son seemed to bear fruit—ten years that I had been waiting to win a love and confidence he had steadily withheld. I had sown in sadness of heart and with many bitter tears, but now I was reaping a joyful harvest.

It was by his wish that I went to Lelia's wedding.

I could not but feel a little sore at the way Geraldine had treated my poor boy. I did not blame the girl herself. She was not of an age to understand the pain she gave by appearing to accept a devotion to which she was really indifferent. But

Geraldine had deliberately planned to win Tom, and had thrown him over only because some greater chance had shown itself elsewhere; and it was not easy to feel cordial to one who had acted thus.

However, Tom wished it, and I went, and stayed three or four days.

The wedding was a very brilliant affair, and Lelia the most bewitching of brides. I need not describe the gayety of all I saw, and, truth to tell, I did not greatly enjoy it. I cannot easily say what was in fault, but the whole *tone* of the society in which Geraldine moved jarred upon me in an indescribable way, and made me long for the quiet of home. I felt a real sense of relief and thankfulness when I reflected that Lelia could never marry my son.

I thought Geraldine looked worn and ill, in spite of her apparent gayety of heart. Nor was I wrong.

She took little notice of me, beyond what ordinary courtesy and hospitality demanded, for the first three days of my visit; but after all was over, and the house had emptied itself of most of its guests, she seemed to grow more softened and pensive, and on the last night that I spent in their house she came to me after I had retired to my room, and, sitting down beside me, threw her arms about me, and burst into a passionate fit of weeping, which lasted so long that I began to grow alarmed.

But she recovered herself at last, and made some excuse. She had been putting such stress upon herself of late, and the strain had been great. She should be all the better for the relief of tears.

Still she seemed agitated and ill at ease, and at last, with another burst of hysterical sobs, tearless, and therefore more painful to hear, said:

"Kate! Kate! What is the secret of your happiness?"

I was so much surprised that I hardly knew how to answer.

"Your face speaks of a happiness beyond anything I have ever known," she went on. "I want to understand it. You have lost a husband you loved—children you loved—you lead a life of the utmost seclusion. You have nothing that I can see to make you happy, and yet you are the happiest woman I know. You are often sad, yet you are always happy. It sounds paradoxical, but it is true—and no troubles seem able to touch you. Tell me your secret—I must know it."

She spoke wildly, fiercely. I could not stop to argue with her; I knew what she meant, and I had my answer ready.

"My secret, Geraldine is no secret. It is only this—that I love God above all else."

She looked at me with wide-open eyes.

"It can't be that."

It can be, and it is. If things are with me as

you suppose—and you are partly right—the only reason I can give you is the one I have just stated."

"Impossible!"

"Nay, Geraldine, think! Would you say it was impossible for a woman's peace and happiness to be made by the constant, unceasing love and care of one she loved best in all the world—husband, father or friend?"

"Why, no," answered Geraldine, slowly; "that is natural enough. Everyone knows that a good husband is enough to make a woman's happiness."

"If so, Geraldine, how infinitely more the unchanging love of God!"

Her face contracted sharply.

"No, no!" she cried; "that is something quite different!"

"Yes, indeed. So different that the human love fades into insignificance before the divine. Human love may fade or change—or may be taken away from us into the light of another world. But God's love cannot change nor falter. He is always the same—the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever. Love Him, Geraldine, and you will have a faithful Friend Who will never leave you, Who will always be near to guide, support, sustain, and comfort you, in life, in death, and in eternity."

Geraldine's face had put on a strange expression.

"In death!" she whispered; "Kate, do you know that I am a dying woman?"

"Dying?"

"Yes. I have an incurable complaint. I have not known it many days myself. I have but one short year, at most to live. Kate, I dare not face death. I am afraid!"

What could I say? I was sadly shocked and startled; but our interview was destined to be cut short at this point. Her husband's voice was heard calling impatiently for his wife.

"I must go!" exclaimed Geraldine, rising, and turning an imploring look upon me. "Kate, tell me one thing. What must I do?"

I could only lay my hand upon the Bible.

"You will find it all there," I answered. "It is the Word of God—a light and a lamp to the path. Search the Scriptures, for in them is eternal life. Pray without ceasing—'The prayer of faith can do more than aught else in this world.'"

Her dark eyes expressed only a dumb entreaty not unmixed with despair.

"Ah, if I had not neglected so long! I fear it is too late now!"

I would have spoken, but another impatient call interrupted my words.

"I *must* go!" cried Geraldine. "Kate—if I have warning— they say I shall—will you come to me?"

"I will."

"You promise me?"

"I promise."

We kissed each other, and she went. I did not see her again alone, before leaving early the next morning. I went home feeling strangely saddened and subdued.

CHAPTER XX.

GERALDINE.

I WENT home to my son and told him all about his cousin's wedding. He said little, but his face wore a stricken look which I could not bear to see.

I counselled him to go abroad and travel for a while—for a year or two, if need be. I thought the change of air and scene would be beneficial, and that the knowledge he would thus gain of other peoples and governments would be of value to him in the political career he hoped by-and-by to commence.

We had friends who were going to journey beyond the ordinary routes common to travellers in those less adventurous days, and Tom was easily persuaded to accompany them.

I went back to Lydgate with my two little ones, and lived very quietly and happily there.

Tom's letters only came at long intervals but I gathered from them that he was gradually recovering tone, and I was glad that he was interested in his travels, and made no objections to his going farther and farther away, extending his original term of absence to double and treble the allotted time.

It was nearly eight years before he settled down again, although he paid visits to his native land from time to time. Those eight years passed very quietly for me; and I think the chief event happened during the first winter after he had left me.

It was then that I received the summons I had been vaguely expecting from my cousin Geraldine.

She did not correspond with me after Lelia's wedding; I think I only received one note from her, and that at Christmas time, and it made no allusion to her health, nor to the conversation we had held together upon the last night of my visit.

But during a bitterly cold March in the following year the summons came.

It was but a few shaky lines, written as if with extreme difficulty.

"I am dying. Will you come to me? You said you would.—GERALDINE."

Besides those words was nothing, save the name of the house where she was. I observed, with a mixture of relief and dismay, that it was not her home, but a small house on the outskirts of the

park, which had sometimes been used as a dower house.

Had there been another breach between Geraldine and her husband?

That I should learn most likely when I got to her.

It was terrible weather for travelling—such cold and such snow; but I dared not delay. Geraldine was dying and wanted me. Common humanity bid me brave everything to reach her.

My servants, and even my two darlings, implored me not to go, but I was resolute. I was obliged to post all the way, for railways were still few and far between, and no line would serve me in going to my present destination.

The journey was tedious, and the cold was frightful, but I arrived without accident at dusk one evening, and found myself in a curious little house, quaint and by no means luxurious in its accommodation, and was told by a young maid-servant, that Mrs. Scrope had been expecting me anxiously ever since the previous afternoon, but that she had just gone off to sleep, worn out by watching.

I asked the girl what servants were in the house, and who was nursing Mrs Scrope. I was told that there was no nurse, but that this maid and another no older had the sole care of the sick lady and of the house.

Did her husband often come?

No, not often. He did not like sick folks ; that was why my lady had come here when she was ill. She liked to keep out of his way, and she couldn't bear the noise.

I would fain have asked more, but hardly felt justified in hearing from this young maid so much to her master's discredit. I was truly glad I had brought my own valuable maid with me, and a hamper of invalid requirements.

I had hesitated a good deal about this last, but consideration of the state of the roads, and Geraldine's inexperience in sickness, had triumphed, and I had decided to bring many little trifles that were of use in illness ; and I was sincerely glad I had done so when I found out how matters were going in this ill-furnished house.

I was taken up to Geraldine's room.

It was a small and poor little apartment, quite lacking all those nameless appointments which give an air of comfort and luxury to the chambers of the sick, when they are endowed with this world's goods. All necessary objects were there, but nothing else. I could hardly believe that this was really the sick room of my cousin Geraldine.

The fire had burnt low, and was black and smothered in ahes ; the room was at once cold and close, and through the uncurtained window the young moon shone frostily, hanging in a sky that still glimmered with the last rays of fading daylight.

Geraldine lay sleeping on the bed, her thin white face just touched by the pale light that entered through the panes of glass so near the bed.

Ah me, how she had changed!

It was almost a skeleton face I saw—so drawn, so hollow, so ghastly. I had to look closely before I could feel certain that it was Geraldine; and my heart throbbed with an intense pity and pain, beyond all power of expression, when I made out the features of the once brilliant Geraldine.

Still she slept on—the heavy sleep of exhausted nature. I saw she would not easily be roused, and I was glad of it.

I summoned my maid, and together we made a blazing fire of logs, and ventilated the room whilst warming it. The blind was drawn down over the cold, desolate snow landscape, and a thick crimson curtain, from the downstair room, was hung over the window, and another over the door.

The deft, practised hands of Janet, my maid, soon gave a very different aspect to that poor room. Whatever else the house could furnish to give warmth and comfort to the invalid was quickly transported thither. During that hour, whilst Geraldine slumbered, we had made her room into a different place—I hardly knew it for the same.

Janet had won the good graces of the two young maids by her quickness and good temper. They

in no way resented our intrusion or the changes we instituted, but helped us all they could, and seemed delighted to be able to share the weight of responsibility with others.

When all was done that was possible, and an air of real comfort given to that poor apartment, Janet brought me some tea, which I was glad to sip, as I sat beside the fire, awaiting the awakening of my patient.

The great logs blazed cheerily; the shaded lamp burned with a softened light upon the table. The crimson curtains and warm rugs gave an air of coziness and comfort to the little room. I grew drowsy myself, after my long, cold journey, and I think I was asleep, when suddenly I heard the sound of my own name faintly spoken by some voice close at hand.

"Kate!"

I started up and approached the bed. Geraldine's eyes were open now.

"Kate—is it you?"

"Yes, Geraldine, I have come," I answered, stooping to kiss her. "You expected me?"

"Yes," she answered slowly, "I expected *you*."

The emphasis upon the pronoun showed me that some comparison was being drawn, but I asked no questions then.

Geraldine was looking slowly round the room.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"In your own room, I answered. "We could not move you now."

"It is the same," she remarked presently. "This is your doing, Kate. It is like you."

"The servants did more than I. We all want to make you as comfortable as possible."

She smiled half sadly, half bitterly.

"You are kind, Kate, you always were. But of what avail is it to minister to a dying woman? What does it all matter now? Kate—I do not believe I have a week to live."

Looking at her sunken face I could well believe it.

"You are not afraid of death, Geraldine?"

She clutched my hand and held it fast; her eyes glittered as they met mine.

"Yes," she gasped, "I am afraid—miserable as my life has been, I am afraid of death. I do not wish to live, and yet I fear to die. Was ever such a wretched woman as I?"

She became much agitated. In her weak state very little sufficed to excite her, much more the thought of a dreaded future.

"Geraldine," I said, "you must try to be calm. You will hurt yourself. God is never sought in vain. Christ has died for every sinner—for you, Geraldine, as well as for all mankind. Take your fear and your sin and your sorrow to Him. He is never entreated in vain. He will take it all away,

and give you in its place, the help and comfort of His Holy Spirit. Only go to Him—He is ever to be found at the foot of the cross."

Geraldine's eyes were fixed imploringly upon me, she listened with a sort of despairing eagerness; but no light came into the hollow face. Indeed, the eyes soon grew dim and weary, and she passed her hand across her face.

"It is no use," she murmured. "I have put it off so long, and now I *cannot* think or grasp the hope, even though I am dying for it."

Ah, that inexorable sowing and reaping! How it seemed to haunt my life!

I saw at this moment that Geraldine was physically incapable of laying hold on the truths I fain would teach her. I ceased to speak then. I knew that she would open the subject herself when she felt able to think and reason.

I ventured an inquiry which had been in my thoughts ever since my arrival.

"Where is Lelia?"

"In Paris." Rather a bitter smile played over Geraldine's face as she spoke.

"But she is coming to you?"

Geraldine put her hand under her pillow, and drew out a little scented note, like many others of its kind that I had seen.

"You see how she is situated," said Geraldine, as she handed the paper to me. It was blistered

with tears, that elegant little missive—I knew those tears had never fallen from Lelia's bright eyes.

"MY DARLING MOTHER,—I am desolated to be unable to come to you, but my husband absolutely forbids my taking the journey in this bitter weather, and what can a poor wife do? I am tempted to disobey him, and fly to you; but I know you would not wish me so to act. We shall hope to hear a better account of you soon; for we quite decline to take the gloomy view of the case that you do. You were so well last time we saw you, that it is impossible you can ail anything very serious now. Take great care of yourself, and you will soon be well again.

"Your desolate and broken-hearted,

"LELIA."

I folded up the letter, and returned it to Geraldine without a word.

"She could not help herself," said the mother.

"Possibly not."

"Lelia is not hard-hearted—only careless, like all young things. I think she is better away. Why should she be saddened?"

Poor Geraldine! My heart bled for her; but what could I say. What comfort had I to offer in place of a daughter's love? She had loved that beautiful child of hers with as deep a love as her

nature was capable of, and this was her reward.

"Your husband?" I asked, with some little hesitation.

The bitterness of her smile!

"He comes each day to inquire; and I see him if I choose to do so. We are not estranged, you understand. I have come here for a little change of air. I find the quiet necessary for me."

What could I say? I could only hold the unhappy woman in my arms and kiss her. whilst my tears fell upon her face.

Her enforced gayety gave way, and she burst into passionate sobbing.

"Ah, Kate! Kate! you are worth all of them to me! You come to me when I need the help that all those I have loved refuse me. I have injured you more than you know. I have been your enemy in ways you never suspected—and yet, at the last, I turn to you, and you are my best and only friend upon my dying bed."

"Nay, Geraldine—not that. You have one Friend nearer and dearer than all others. Turn to Him, He will comfort you now."

How many times that night, and in the dreary days that followed, did I repeat those words, or words like to them, and urge my poor dying cousin to turn her eyes upwards, and look upon the Saviour Who had died upon the cross for her sins. How many long hours did I spend upon my knees

in intense prayer for one who seemed unable to pray for herself; how often did I passionately resist the languor of despair that settled again and again upon the struggling soul, and threatened to quench the dim spark that had at last been lighted there!

I pray God it may never again be my lot to watch by such a death-bed!

I was not new to the office of nurse and watcher. I had seen those whom best I loved go down into the shadowy valley at the call of the unseen Father. I had been with them till the very last, and I had seen how fearlessly they trod that mysterious path. I could see in their shining faces that it was light, and not darkness, to them.

But this journey was different from anything I had witnessed before. This traveller was *alone*, or thought herself alone, as she set out upon that voyage towards the great unknown land.

No light from the other side shone upon the pathway for her. The shadows of the valley were very dark—very dismal. No voice said to her, "I will be with thee,"—no rod, no staff seemed held out to help her along the dark way.

And the passage too was a hard and stormy one. Poor Geraldine suffered much during those long, dark days when she lay dying, whilst Death yet held aloof, as if he waited until she should cease to fear him, before he took her away.

I never left her, night or day, during all that terrible time. She could not bear me out of her sight, and I grew gradually to see with joy that my words, and those from the Great Book I read to her whenever she could attend, did in some way soothe and quiet her. She no longer shook her head and murmured, "I can't! I can't! Let me rest!" When I begged her to look to God and accept the pardon her soul so craved. Now she would look at me with her dim eyes and say:

"You pray, Kate—your prayers will be heard. Pray for me—pray! I do repent! Pray that faith may come!"

She told me much of her past life in her hours of comparative ease—confessed much that was wrong—faults against me and against others. Let these be forgotten; they were repented of at the last—who can doubt that they were forgiven too?

As we sow, so shall we reap. My poor Geraldine was reaping her harvest on her miserable death-bed. But I thanked God that the harvest was reaped in the time of this present life. Suffering and loneliness did bring her to her Saviour at last; and one faint gleam of light did pierce the blackness of the path before her. Thank God for that! For how much more sad and awful is the fate of those who leave this world smiling and hardened—the harvest of their evil deeds to be reaped in the life to come!

As we sow, so do we reap.

It was with no triumphant gladness— no sense of fearless confidence—that the wearied soul freed itself at last from the fetters of the flesh, and went out to meet the new eternal life. No; there was none of that glad sense of freedom and love to cheer my poor Geraldine, as she stepped shudderingly into the shadows of the dark valley upon whose borders her feet had so long been standing.

The end came rather suddenly at the very last, long though we had expected it.

She had seen her husband early in the day, and had exchanged with him a few words more loving than usual. He had appeared somewhat softened by her extreme illness, and had kissed her with some show of affection, whilst Geraldine had whispered:

"Then all is forgiven between us, Henry."

She had slept during the afternoon, and had seemed refreshed when she woke, just at sunset.

The window looked west, and the glow in the frosty sky was very beautiful.

I was sitting holding her hand when she said, "Is heaven behind there, Kate?"

"Heaven is where God is," I answered.

"Tell me about it. Talk to me," she said.

I quoted a few such comforting texts as came at once into my mind, ending with this one:

"He will swallow up death in victory; and the

Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces."

Geraldine slowly repeated these words after me.

"'Wipe away tears from all faces.' Will He wipe away mine, Kate?"

"Yes, dear. I am sure of it. Your sins are washed away in His blood. You believe his promises. He will take you to the home He has prepared for you. You are not afraid now, are you, Geraldine?"

She did not answer. The expression of her face startled me. The gray shadow was one that I knew so well. It could mean but one thing.

"Death is swallowed up in victory," she said in a faint far-away voice; "Kate—I believe—it is."

Then her head fell back; and I knew that Geraldine was dead.

CHAPTER XXI.

MY CHILDREN.

I REMAINED for my cousin's funeral, and then went home to resume my quiet, uneventful life there.

Nothing of any note happened for many years.

Malcolm and Elizabeth grew from childhood into youth, and in them I seemed to live my life anew.

These children were everything that mother's heart could wish. Anything more touching than their devotion to me, more beautiful than their love towards one another, I never have seen, nor could I wish to see.

Malcolm did not go to school. He had an excellent tutor, who came daily to teach him, and his was one of those peculiarly bright and happy temperaments that do not seem to require the discipline of school to form them, and I felt that it would be cruelty to both children to separate them.

So the brother and sister grew up together, lov-

ing and beloved, sharing each other's joys and sorrows, studies and recreations, almost as if one heart and spirit animated both.

Very happy, peaceful years were those. It seemed to me sometimes as if a foretaste of heaven were vouchsafed to me then, in the atmosphere of love that reigned in our home—love to God and love to man

My other boys were all well and happy.

Thomas, quite recovered in mind and body, was still more or less abroad, but meditated shortly settling at the Mount and attempting to get a seat in Parliament. He did not speak of marriage yet, but I hoped that sooner or later he would learn to love again.

Harold had risen to the rank of captain, and was a great deal away on foreign service. He liked his profession increasingly, and was likely to rise in it. Colonel Lyon still remained his staunch friend and mine, and always visited me when he had the chance to do so.

Arthur was studying at the Bar, and lived in London. He was still young, but very clever, they all said, and was already engaged to a very charming and wealthy girl—the daughter of a judge who had taken a great fancy to Arthur. Every one told me that his prospects were excellent.

Already I was able to feel proud of my sons. Whenever I did see them I had reason to feel

proud and glad. I did not perhaps know them as intimately as I should have done had I been a different woman during their early childhood; but Tom had given me his whole confidence, and the other two treated me with an affectionate respect which left little to be desired. Whilst as for my twin darlings—the children of my old age—no words can express their loving devotion.

I was very happy. I think all my children had learnt to serve and love God. Tom, I knew, had come back to the earnest, steadfast faith his father had taught; and although I could not feel quite the same certainty about Harold and Arthur, I had reason to believe that they too had attained to a quiet, manly belief, not demonstrative or easy to detect, perhaps, but none the less sincere for that, nor the more easy to uproot.

Malcolm and Elizabeth had grown up from infancy in the path which I fain would myself have trod. Their simple, childlike faith and earnest, trustful love taught me many a lesson, whilst they thought I was teaching them.

Neither did they outgrow their childish faith; rather did it deepen and widen with the growth of their minds, and many times have the tears started to my eyes, as I have heard them talk to one another over the words of their daily chapter, which they never missed reading each day together no matter what else had to be left undone.

Ah yes, those were happy days and years. They fled away so fast that I can hardly believe, looking back, how long a period of time they really covered.

My fiftieth birthday made a sort of break in the quiet monotony of our lives. I remember it well both for its own sake and for what followed almost immediately afterwards.

We had quite a family gathering to celebrate it. By a fortunate chance, Harold's leave was due at the time. Tom ended his travels, and came home, whilst Arthur took a holiday and joined us at Lydgate.

It was a very happy family gathering—the first we had been able to celebrate since the boys had been fairly launched in the world. I think we all enjoyed it greatly. I did so, most certainly, but for one drawback—a feeling of illness and weakness for which I could not at all account.

I had been blessed all my life long with excellent health. I had never been seriously ill, and had seldom ailed anything at all.

The sense of languor which hung about me for many days, the aching head, the weary limbs, were sensations so new to me that I did not understand what they could mean, and I struggled against the overpowering sense of illness as long as ever I could.

But at last I could hold out no longer. I gave

in and took to my bed, which I did not leave again for many long weeks.

It was typhoid fever that laid me low; but in those days the nature and course of the malady were far less known than it is now.

For many weeks I lay prostrate, almost at death's door; and several times the doctors gave me up, and believed that I could never rally again.

Yet those weeks were very precious ones, in spite of weakness and sickness and suffering. I would not be without the memories they call up—very precious memories they are to me.

My head was clear. I knew those about me. I could often talk with them, as they sat beside me in the quiet of the sick room.

As I lay there, face to face with death, all reserve seemed to melt away, and my sons talked to me out of the fulness of their hearts.

"Mother, we cannot spare you." Those words were often spoken tenderly in my ear. "Mother, you must live for our sakes."

"Dear boys," I sometimes said, "I feel as if I had done so little for you all."

"Little! Ah, mother, you do not know! We have been very ungrateful, very careless, very unkind. We often hurt you by our rough words; but—ah, how you made us reverence you! When we look back to those days, we would give all to undo what we did and said that hurt you!"

Dear loving boys! They did not know that the fault was mine that had caused the early breach between us. But did not this make amends for all? Yes, indeed! I was repaid a thousandfold for every little effort, for every feeble prayer. How true it is that those who go forth weeping with their seed shall come again rejoicing, bearing their sheaves with them!

In the dark hours, too, when death seemed hovering very closely over my head, still more precious assurances were given to me.

"Shall I see my boys again, when the call comes for them?" I sometimes asked. "Are they following in the Great Master's footsteps, and will they reach the promised home at last?"

"We are trying, mother," would be the steady answer. "God helping us, we will come to you by-and-by."

"You will fight your battles bravely? You will never be ashamed of the banner under which you serve?"

"Never!"

"Nor grow weary of the service?"

"No—no. How can we, when we have your example before us?"

"Not mine, my children, not mine, but that of our Master and only Saviour Jesus Christ."

"Yes, and yours too, who brought us to love Him at last."

Ah, happy days! Ah, blessed assurances! With my dear ones around me, giving me such sweet proofs of love, how could I be otherwise than joyously resigned

The valley of the shadow! Call it rather the vale of light. As I stood near its brink, and looked down into its depths, there was no darkness there for me, only a shining river, and on its farther shore my dear ones watching and waiting.

Gladly would I have gone to them—but it was not to be; and equally ready was I to stay, if my Father willed it.

His goodness to me was so great, His love such an overshadowing presence, that to do His will was enough. I could lie at rest beneath His loving care, to live or to die as He bid me.

And He bid me live.

Was it in answer to my children's prayers that my life was given back to me as by a miracle? Why not? Has God's ear grown deaf, or is His arm shortened, that we talk and act as if prayer were not a real, living power?

The fever left me weak as a babe. I knew at last that I should live, to take up the burden of life I had thought to lay down.

And I was content, nay, glad to do so. The thought of the long, eternal rest had been very welcome; but was not each year now vouchsafed

me a year in which to praise and love God, and work for Him to the best of my ability? As I lay many weeks, in the helplessness of very gradually returning strength, I prayed that the life thus restored to me might be dedicated wholly to the God whose servant I called myself.

I was very tenderly nursed and cared for during all these long weeks, by my own children firstly, and then by my dear friend and neighbor, Mrs. Trefusis. I have had no space in my story hitherto to talk of the friends by whom I was surrounded in my home; but the best and nearest of these was Mrs. Trefusis, whose son, George, had accompanied my Lovel upon that last fatal ride.

George had deeply felt his young companion's death, and had haunted us persistently ever since, almost taking the place of a son to me sometimes, when my elder boys had been away.

Mrs. Trefusis was always ready with help or counsel, and was a true friend, and at the crisis of my illness, had come with her eldest unmarried daughter, Caroline, to help in the nursing, and to be a stay and support to my poor little Elizabeth, who at sixteen was hardly competent to manage the house and the nursing, and all that falls upon an only daughter at such a season.

They were very good and kind and a great comfort. I felt that all was going right, and my mind was relieved of all its burden.

When I became convalescent, and able to look after matters somewhat myself, they went away; but the effects of this visit were yet to be seen, in results of which I never dreamed.

Harold had had to leave as soon as I was pronounced out of danger; and Arthur could not remain; but he always managed to spend an alternate Sunday with me, and on one of these I had a new proof of my sons' generous devotion to me.

"Mother," said Arthur one day, as he sat beside my couch, "are you well enough to talk a little business?"

"Yes, certainly," I answered, expecting him to begin about his possible marriage.

"And you will not think it cool what I am going to say?"

"Not if I can help it," I answered smiling.

"Well, it is just this," went on Arthur, speaking rapidly and clearly. "Harold and I have been talking things over, and we have both arrived at the same conclusion. You know, of course, that Malcolm is a youngest son, and in the ordinary course of things would have to turn to by-and-by and take to some profession. But that must necessarily take him away from you and from home, and then if Elizabeth should marry (and she is growing so lovely that she is sure to be claimed sooner or later) you would be left alone, without one of your children near you. Now this we cannot bear. You know

that we are well provided for by our father, and we both have our professions, Harold and I, which seem likely to become lucrative. Harold loves soldiering far too well ever to settle down as a country gentleman, and my ambition is for a career that will tie me more or less to London. This being the case, it is our great wish that Malcolm should remain with you—'the son of your old age,' —and that you should make him your heir. We know you have absolute control over your own property. Let Malcolm live with you here, whether he marries or whether he remains single. Let it be understood that it is his house, and that it is his vocation to be a country squire, looking after things first for you, and then for himself. If this arrangement is fully made, then we shall all know that, whatever happens, our mother is not alone, but has one of her children, and one of those most fitted for the office—to care for her and cherish her. It will be such a comfort, so far outweighing all other considerations, that Harold and I beg of you not to refuse our joint request."

My heart was so full that I could hardly find voice to answer. What more could a mother need than such solid testimony as this, of the love of her sons?

Here were two young men, full of ambition, by no means ignorant of the value of wealth, combining in wishing to pass on to a younger brother a fine

inheritance, in order to secure for me the constant companionship of one of my sons.

Tears stood in my eyes, and I could not answer. Arthur rose and kissed me.

"You must think about it, mother," said he. "You will please us most by doing as we wish. We do wish it most earnestly."

CHAPTER XXII.

MARRYING AND GIVING IN MARRIAGE.

DAYS had come and days had gone. My health had gradually come back to me. I began once more to take short drives in the sunny park, and life seemed very sweet and beautiful, surrounded as I was by so much love and tenderness.

"Surely I will be with thee."

How often during the past weeks had those words—the last my husband had spoken—rung in my ears! How true I had found them! True then, and true now. Surely no woman was ever so blessed as I in my children's love, and in a love higher and holier still. God's fatherly presence seemed very near in those days—each week, as it passed, seemed to bring me nearer to Him.

And there was more happiness still in store for me. One sunny afternoon, Tom came and drew my arm within his, although I hardly needed that strong support now.

I fancied by his preoccupied manner that he had

something to say of unusual importance, and I was not mistaken.

By-and-by we sat down in a sheltered nook, and then he began:

"Mother, I have something to say to you."

"Yes, my boy."

I called him my boy still, although he was nearly thirty. Sons, I suppose, always remain boys to their mothers.

"Can you guess, mother?"

I looked at him doubtfully; but I had not the clue to his thoughts, and was afraid to hazard a suggestion.

"I think you had better tell me."

"Then I will. I have asked Caroline Trefusis to be my wife, and she has consented."

I kissed him with some emotion.

"My boy, that is good news for me."

"You are pleased, mother?"

"I am, indeed—more pleased than I can say."

"And you will give my Lena a mother's love? You do love her, do you not?"

"I do, indeed. I think she is as sweet as she is pretty, and as good as she is sweet. She always makes me think of a violet, with her deep eyes, her drooping, flower-like head, and her gentle modest air."

Tom looked pleased. He liked to hear his love praised so warmly.

I was truly glad to hear his news. I had long wished that my eldest son would make for himself a home and ties. He was far more suited to family life than to knocking about the world, and marriage would not hinder a Parliamentary career, if he should be successful in that ambition.

"Have you decided when to be married?"

"Early next year, we hope," answered Tom, smiling; and after a pause he added:

"They say the Great Exhibition will be opened some time then, and I want to take Lena to see it. She has never been to London."

I smiled and sighed at the same time. History, they say, repeats itself. I think it does indeed. I had seen London for the first time on my bridal trip; and now Tom talked of doing as his father had done before him, of taking his young wife to the great metropolis as an introduction to married life.

There was little danger, however, of history repeating itself further. Sweet, gentle Caroline Trefusis would be a different wife from imperious, wayward Kate Lovel.

Tom's engagement gave great satisfaction. We liked the family, and Caroline won all hearts by her sweetness and gentleness. It was not the sweetness of insipidity, nor the gentleness of weakness; the girl had a fine nature, a most lovable disposition. In some of the confidences she gave me, which I found very congenial, she told me that

she had suffered as a child from a violent temper and a great inclination to selfishness; but that she had been aroused by some words she had heard in a sermon, and had seen her sins in the light in which others must see them. Much shocked and distressed, she had set herself steadfastly and prayerfully to conquer them; and, by God's grace, she had so far succeeded, that all outward indications of passion had long been subdued, and only from the girl's own lips could one learn the struggle that still went on at times.

Talks like these gave me an insight into the character of my future daughter-in-law that I found very cheering and encouraging, and I felt increasingly certain that she would make a good wife to my dear boy, whom she loved as a true woman does love, deeply and unselfishly.

Tom passed nearly all that autumn and winter at Lydgate with me, in order to be near Caroline. We spent Christmas there very happily, and then we all migrated to the Mount, taking Mrs. Trefusis and her daughter with us; and very busy we all were in planning how the house could be improved and renovated, in order to receive its new mistress. Caroline declared that all was perfect as it stood; but Tom was by no means of that opinion, and under his direction a new air of luxury and taste began to appear in the somewhat formal rooms of his house.

And in the year following Tom was married, and carried his bride off to London.

I took Malcolm and Elizabeth up by-and-by, to see the wonderful Exhibition; and Mrs. Trefusis did the same by her children, and we saw the sights of London together, and our young folk enjoyed themselves to their hearts' content.

Are mothers blind?

The question is often asked, and not without reason. Yet certainly Mrs. Trefusis and I remained blind to a something that was going on under our very eyes.

I have spoken of George Trefusis, and his almost filial attention to me ever since the accident which cost Lovel his life.

He never could quite rid himself of the haunting thought that he was in some indirect way the cause of that accident, and he did everything that a boy could do to "make up" to me for the loss of a son.

When my twin children were born, and had begun to toddle and lisp little words, George became their most devoted slave, and as Elizabeth began to grow and develop, he became her faithful champion.

George had grown from a boy to a man, and Elizabeth from a baby to a young girl, but his homage had never ceased and never cooled, and he loved her as dearly as her own brothers did.

He was as a brother to her, as I had always said,

and I had watched the dawning love on both sides without in the least recognizing its true nature.

But when a maiden is nearly seventeen, and a man of nearly thirty pays her the devoted attention that George Trefusis always showed my Elizabeth, it is surely time for a mother to awake from her dream of brotherly and sisterly love, and face the truth at all costs.

Yet my eyes remained blinded. My lovely little Elizabeth was still a child to me, despite her thoughtful nature and womanly ways. These past ten years of peaceful happiness had flown so fast, that I could not realize how they had changed my child into a maiden—a very sweet and thoughtful maiden too, with a mind as pure and lovely as her face—and I never guessed that already that loving heart was passing out of my darling's keeping, yielding itself unconsciously into the hands of another.

George was in the diplomatic service, and was rising rapidly. He was a good deal abroad, and was likely to be more so, for a post was soon to be offered him in connection with the embassy at Vienna, and he had made up his mind, or almost so, to accept it. He asked my advice (I little then knew why), and I unhesitatingly counselled him not to lose so good a chance of advancement.

I sometimes wondered at the manner he adopted towards me, and the eagerness he always showed to

join our circle whenever the chance allowed; but I was far from guessing the true cause of his devotion.

I do not think my sweet Elizabeth had as yet awakened to the knowledge of her own heart. George had always been her playmate and champion, ever since she could run alone. She had seen more of him than of her own elder brothers, and she looked up to him, and leaned upon him, in a way that is not common between brothers and sisters. He was as much a part of her life as myself or Malcolm, and she became bound up in him before she understood whither her steps were tending. I think George knew what the end must be, but nobody else did.

A year passed quickly on after Tom's wedding. My first grandchild had been born, and I had taken Elizabath with me to see the little stranger. On our arrival we had found George there, on a brief visit to his sister.

He was doing very well in Vienna, he told us, and liked the life; but his time was too fully occupied to leave room for many visits home. He meant to come to see us before he went back.

He and Elizabeth had not met for a year, so it did not surprise me that they sought each other out a good deal, and were much together during this week.

When we left the Mount, Elizabeth was preoc-

cupied and unusually thoughtful. I wondered sometimes what was on her mind; but, as she always gave me her confidence, I waited for her to speak, and did not press her by any questions.

When we reached home this preoccupation still continued, and at last I learned its cause.

"Mother," she said to me one day, kneeling at my feet, and looking up at me with her sweet eyes, "George is coming to see you to-morrow."

"Well, my darling, there is nothing very strange in that, is there?"

"Ah, but this is different," said Elizabeth softly, a faint crimson mantling in her cheek. "He is coming this time—about me."

Then I understood. The scales fell from my eyes. I saw my sweet "baby girl" as others saw her—a very lovely maiden, made to be loved; and I knew that the time had come when I must give her up. Not quite immediately, perhaps—still the beginning of the end.

I was silent only for a few brief seconds, but I seemed to have time for a perfect panorama of thought. My heart went up to God in a prayer for guidance and for unselfishness; and the help I needed was sent down. I was able to smile into my darling's face as I kissed her smooth white brow.

"About you, my little one? Ah me, how the years go by! So my tiny Elizabeth, who was but

yesterday, as it seems, a little toddling child, is a woman now? Is that what you have come to tell your old mother? Is that what George is coming to-morrow to talk about with me?"

The look of loving gratitude and relief that swept over the fair face was more than payment for the effort I had made to keep in check my own selfish regrets.

"Dearest mother, how good you are!" she said softly. "I was afraid you would be grieved."

I smiled into that loving, tremulous face—I could smile now without an effort.

"My darling forgets that her old mother was once young herself."

She clasped me round the neck, and covered my face with an April-like mingling of tears and kisses,

"Mother, sweet mother, you are always young—you always understand. There is nobody like you in all the world. You know that it is not because I love you less that—that——"

"I know, Elizabeth; I understand. It is God who has so ordained it. Each one of us to whom He has vouchsafed this great love knows what it is—how we must leave all else, father, mother, home and friends, to cleave to the husband of our choice. What God has joined together let not man put asunder. My darling, has God blessed your love?"

"Mother dear, I think so—I do indeed. Lov-

ing George so much seems to bring me nearer to God."

I kissed her again and again, and my heart gave thanks for this.

"That is enough, my child. If the human love seems to bring us nearer to God, instead of taking us away from Him, we can hardly be loving contrary to His wishes. He still holds the first place in my daughter's heart?"

Her clear eyes looked into mine, shining with a beautiful, reverent light.

"Ah, yes, mother, God stands first. No other love can ever, I think, be like *that*."

We were silent then for a long time, holding each other very close. I felt that the new love had but bound my child closer to me; and I prayed yet again that no selfishness on my part might ever stand between her and her happiness, nor loosen the bond of loving sympathy that bound us so close together.

What makes us mothers so often stand in our children's way, and refuse them motherly sympathy and love, just when they need it most? Are they not doing only what we did before them? Why are we so loth to let them go? Why do we so often lay stumbling-blocks in their way, and speak words and do deeds that leave bitter memories behind, when all might have been so loving and so sweet?

Well, thank God that He helped me to hide from my child all that could hurt or pain her. The dawn in her life of a deeper love than ever could be mine never raised one little cloud between us, but rather drew us closer and more close together.

. . . . . .

"I will not claim her yet, mother—you will let me call you mother, will you not?" said George. "I will be patient, and wait for her till she is older; but you will let us write? You will let it be a real engagement?"

I could not but smile at his simplicity.

"Do you think I am so young that I try to lock the stable door after the horse is stolen? Is it not an engagement already?"

George looked me steadily in the face.

"It shall not be one without your sanction, mother."

I laid my hand in his in token of gratitude, for I knew he meant what he said.

"Thank you, George," I said; "that is spoken like a man and a gentleman—like your father's son. But your engagement has my sanction. You and Elizabeth have my free permission to correspond; and when she is twenty you may claim her as your wife."

They came and kissed me, with a loving gratitude very sweet.

"Mother," said George, in his honest way, "you shall find, God helping me, that you have not lost a daughter, but gained a son."

"I believe you, George," I answered; "you have always been dear to me—always ranked next, after my own boys."

His face lighted with pleasure.

"And now I am one of your own boys!"

"Yes," I answered, smiling, "I will accept you as such from this time forth."

He looked so honestly gratified that I felt once again repaid for any effort I had made.

"And you will be very good to my little Elizabeth? Remember, she is my youngest, and my special darling."

He turned and put his arm round the slight figure, and his face seemed to shine.

"I would gladly die for her," he answered, with quiet emphasis; "but, please God, I shall live for her and be a good husband, and make a good son to you."

Then he led her away, to pour out into her ear, as I doubted not, all the love and devotion of his honest heart.

I think the tears gathered in my eyes as I sat alone, but they were not tears of sorrow.

An arm was thrown round my neck, and a warm cheek pressed to mine.

"Never mind, mother," said Malcolm's loving voice, "you know you will always have me!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

WAR.

ELIZABETH'S engagement was formally sanctioned; and George left us to resume the quiet life he had for the moment disturbed.

I had thought carefully over the proposition made me by my second and third sons in regard to the ultimate disposal of Lydgate, and although I had not yet made up my mind to pass them over for the sake of Malcolm, I did feel myself justified in keeping the lad with me, and making him eventually independent of any profession. I could do this without robbing the other children, and I knew that I was pleasing them all by adopting this course.

Since my illness, I had felt the need of assistance in the management of the property, and Malcolm showed an aptitude for a "Squire's" duties that pleased and surprised me.

He was clever and kind and thoughtful, and soon became a universal favorite with tenants and laborers. As time passed on, I began to consider more seriously as to the propriety of willing to him Lydgate at my decease. I had not settled the point, and I never had to, as things turned out.

Man proposes, and God disposes.

We lived a very quiet life down at Lydgate. The affairs of the great world without troubled us but little. Malcolm was no politician, and Elizabeth and I were not fond of the study of the newspapers.

We knew, of course, that Europe was somewhat unsettled, that Russia was giving rise to uneasiness by her policy, and that the Continental Powers were watching her with some displeasure.

But the actual proclamation of war surprised and startled us; and Malcolm hurried up to London, where Tom was at the time residing (he was a Member of Parliament then), in order to learn all that was going on, and what was likely to be the result.

I saw him go without misgiving. I little knew the strange, exciting influences to which he would be exposed, when once he reached the vortex of the great capital.

He was gone three weeks, and came back with the war fever burning within him.

I am not the only mother now living who can

call to remembrance the almost sickening feeling with which she heard those eager words, spoken by one or another of her brave sons:

"Mother, I must go! They want soldiers. I must fight for my country."

My heart sank within me when my boy came to me with these words on his lips. This was a harder trial than the one I had lately been through, when I yielded up Elizabeth to her betrothal.

I was giving her up to a happy wedded life; but it seemed like giving up my boy to danger, and perhaps to death.

Still I tried to think calmly, and to distinguish between the mere selfish longing to keep him with me, and the greater difficulties that lay, as I fancied, in his path. I talked to him of his inexperience and want of training; but he swept away my arguments as fast as they rose.

"He knew he could get a commission. Men were wanted, and Tom had influence. He was a first-rate horseman, and should apply for a cavalry commission. He had made inquiries, and knew he could get one. He had not visited Harold for nothing. He knew what military life and discipline were like. In times like these it was not hard to qualify oneself for the duties of the position. He *must* go—he felt it his duty, as well as his greatest wish."

What could I say or do? I saw the boy's mind

was made up. When that is the case, opposition is of little avail.

I urged him as much as I could to abandon the idea, and forget the wish he had so earnestly formed; but even as I spoke I knew that the wish had already become a part of his nature.

He had soldier's blood in his veins on both sides. Could I wonder that the fever, once caught, should rage furiously? Had I been in his place, might I not in all probability have felt the same?

Only once did I appeal to his love for me; and I was not sure, even while I spoke, if such an appeal were quite fair.

"I thought you were going to stay always with me, Malcolm?"

"Ah, mother," he said, "don't break my heart. You know that you can make me stay if you will; but do not—please do not. I will keep my promise. I will be your own special son, and come back to you and take care of you all your life. But let me, just this once, see a little of the battle of life. Let me go out, as other men are doing, and strike one blow for the honor of our country. You do not know what it is like, this craving to join the ranks. Harold is going—let me go too. The war cannot last long. Then, I will come home to you, and never leave you any more. You have Elizabeth now. It is my last chance of just one glimpse of the real, living, fighting world. A man ought

to do his duty, you know, mother, and I can be spared just for a time. Let me go; and I will come back and settle down, and be satisfied for always with my one campaign."

So my boy pleaded—his bright young face flushed with eager longing, his whole frame seeming to tremble with eagerness for my answer. I knew that, with all his eagerness, he would abide by my decision.

"And suppose you never do come back?" I answered gently.

"Now, mother," you must not think that. I cannot have you faint-hearted. Of course, I shall come back. I shall take care of myself for your sake, and come home covered with glory. Think how many soldiers go out to war, and how few, comparatively, are killed."

He spoke lightly, and I smiled, whilst my heart sank, for I was thinking of the desolate homes made by every war. I had known something of this in my early life; but my children had lived in peaceful days, and war was to them but a pageant of glory and adventure.

"Your heart is quite set upon it, Malcolm?"

"Yes, mother dear; I feel as if I must go."

"Will you wait for a week, and think the matter quietly over? If at the end of that time you still feel as you do now, I will allow you to follow out your own wishes."

He looked eager, and almost impatient at the delay, but his sweet temper triumphed over temporary vexation, and he accepted my condition.

I had little hope that a week would bring any change to his feelings; neither did it.

As the days passed by, I could trace by his eager thirst for news that the fever still burnt within him. It was as much for my sake as for his that I asked for this respite, for I wanted time to grow reconciled, as far as I could, to the possibilities of the future.

Elizabeth said to me one day—

"Malcolm means to go, mother."

"I know it, dear."

"Do you mind so very much?"

"It is always hard to make up our minds to spare our children, Elizabeth; but I shall not hinder the boy. He shall takes his mother's blessing with him when he goes."

"Ah, yes, mother, you are always so good to us;" then, after a pause, she added slowly, "Do you know, I think if I were a man, I should want to go too."

I could not help smiling as I answered:

"Possibly, if I were in Malcolm's place, I might say the same."

Elizabeth laughed softly and clapped her hands.

"Ah, mother, you see we all think alike. When

our country needs us, we are all eager to go out to serve her."

"Yes, dear, only it is a little hard on us mothers. We cannot help feeling as if all would go well, even if *our* sons stayed at home. Harold is a soldier by profession. His duty is clear; but I cannot quite see why our Malcolm must needs go."

"Nor I exactly, except that his heart is set on it; and I feel as if I should say the same in his place."

"You are not afraid, then, to let him go?"

Her bright face clouded a little.

"I am not going to let myself feel afraid. I do not think God would let our Malcolm die like that."

I could not restrain a sigh. How many have experienced just such a sentiment, who yet have had to yield up their nearest and dearest in this cruel fight!

"Malcolm says the danger is so slight. He is so sure of coming home."

"Young soldiers are ever hopeful; they only see the brightness and glory. It is we who are left behind that tremble for them."

"Are you afraid, mother dear?"

"I have known something of war, my child."

"But so many always come back."

"And so many are left behind."

Her face looked grave once more. I looked at her with a smile, and asked:

"Are you not glad that George is safe in Vienna?"

A new look swept across her face.

"Oh, yes, indeed, mother," she answered quickly; and as I made no comment, she continued, speaking slowly, "I did not know that I was careless of Malcolm's safety before."

She looked distressed. I had to become consoler in my turn, for she was almost remorseful at the calm way in which she had talked of Malcolm's project.

"My love," I said, "it is right that George should stand first with you. A brother may be very dear to you, as Malcolm is; but he cannot fill the place in your heart that is given to your affianced husband. If we lose our Malcolm your life will not be left desolate; but to lose George would be almost like being widowed."

The week went by, and Malcolm's purpose had but strengthened with each day that passed.

I gave him leave to do as he wished, and promised him all the needful help.

There is nothing to be gained by half-measures. I would have kept my son away from the war, if I could have done so without feeling that I stretched my authority beyond its right limits. As I had failed in this, it only remained to me to throw all

my energies into doing the very best for the boy that was possible.

He was very joyful and grateful, quite understanding that I had made a sacrifice, and almost remorseful that he had been the cause of giving me any pain, however indirect.

"You know that it is not that I love you less," he said appealingly.

"I know that well, my boy."

"I would have stayed, if you had bidden me."

"I know that too."

"You are the best mother in the world. I shall never forget it. When I come back and settle down you shall have no cause to regret that you let me go."

He was very tender and loving all the days that remained, but we saw little of him at Lydgate. He was in London for the most part, going through the necessary qualifications, and making the needful preparations for departure.

His commission was purchased in the 17th Lancers, and the boy was wild with excitement and delight at the thought of the active service so soon to be entered on.

Harold had been for years in the army, and had hardly seen smoke, and here was he about to plunge into the thick of the campaign without one wasted year.

He ran down home whenever he could spare the

time—the railways had made travelling easy by this time—and on each visit we observed in him a greater enthusiasm than on the last.

It was hard not to catch the fire from him. Elizabeth did do so, and was almost as eager as he was for the real commencement of operations. Even I, who knew something of the realities of war, could not remain unsympathetic; and if I could not quite share their enthusiasm, I could at least witness it without a pang.

I remember the last evening that my boy spent with us. The thought of the parting upon the morrow lay heavy upon all hearts. We were more silent than was our wont, and, as if to cover the long pauses that tried our composure, Elizabeth went to the piano, and played softly and sweetly.

Malcolm came and sat beside me, and held my hands very closely in his. At this moment I felt that I was the stronger of the two.

"My boy," I said softly, "one question I should like to ask, before I send you out into this world of peril. If it be God's will that you do not come back to us, will it still be well with you?"

His beautiful eyes looked into mine, and I thought no worse of my soldier boy that they were filled with tears.

"Mother dear," he answered, with a little huskiness in his voice, "I have not lived at your side all my life for nothing. I have tried to follow in your

footsteps, as you have followed in those of our Lord; and I trust and hope that nothing, either in life or death, can separate me from the love of Him, our glorious Redeemer."

"Thank God!" was all I found words to say, as I held my boy very closely in my arms.

His curly head was pressed to my cheek, and I felt that every now and again a stifled sob burst from him.

Tears gathered in my own eyes, but for his sake I held them back. Many and many a time had I held my last-born son in my arms, whilst he wept out his griefs upon my shoulder. Was it strange that I should be doing this upon the very last evening we were destined to spend together upon earth?

I did not know at the time that my young soldier would never come back to me; but a dim presentiment of coming woe stole over me as we sat together there. I lifted my heart in fervent prayer—prayer that my boy might be mercifully preserved from harm; prayer that I might resign myself to the Heavenly Father's will, whatsoever, form that will might take.

"You are praying for me, mother," whispered Malcolm in my ear.

"Yes, my boy. Your mother's heart will hardly cease praying for you all the days of your absence."

"I know it," he answered in the same husky tone. "I shall think of it every day. Even in the thick of the battle I shall say to myself, 'Mother is praying for me.' That is the best kind of armor I can have."

"My boy must gird himself with the whole armor of God," I answered, holding him closer and more closely in my arms. "I have put a little Bible amongst your most necessary things. Never forget that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God."

"I will not. I will carry that little Bible next my heart, and read it every day. Whilst you are praying for your soldier boy, he will be praying for you. It will be a sort of bond, keeping us close together even in absence."

Elizabeth's music ceased, and she came over towards us, her eyes shining in tears.

"Pray with us, mother, this last night, as you used to pray with us as children. And when Malcolm comes back to us we will pray all together again."

And so we knelt side by side, and prayed, and a deep sense of God's protecting love and care settled upon each one of us.

The memory of that night is still green in my heart. The joy and comfort it gave me enabled me to smile a bright farewell upon my boy as he rode away on the morrow in all the gallant grace of his

young manhood, brave and bright and hopeful.

Well that we could not see the future, else my son could hardly have left me with a smile upon his face.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MY TWINS.

WHO that lived in the days of the Crimean War can ever forget the electric thrill that ran through the length and breadth of the land at the news of the cavalry charge at Balaklava—the charge of the Light Brigade?

Can I ever forget it?

Not if I live to be a hundred.

Never shall I forget the day when the news of that heroic charge reached us, for my boy was in it. The 17th Lancers were amongst those who rode at the Russian guns, and Malcolm Baskerville was one of those who did *not* ride back.

Six hundred and seven brave soldiers rode into that valley—and but one hundred and ninety-eight returned!

Think what that means. Four hundred desolate homes—many hundred hearts weighed down by crushing sorrow—and all for some fatal blunder!

I think that was the hardest part of all—the thought that it had been all a mistake, that sad loss of life—a mistake that has never yet been explained, and never can be, till the great day when all secrets are discovered.

Yet surely those brave horsemen knew, as they gallantly rode to their death, that the order which sent them there was some fatal misconception. Ah, how I wept over the spirited lines in which a great poet sang of that wild, brave charge:—

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldier knew
  Some one had blundered.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die;
Into the Valley of Death
  Rode the six hundred.

* * * *

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
  All the world wondered.
Honor the charge they made!
Honor the Light Brigade,
  Noble six hundred!

Even to this day I cannot read these soul-stirring lines without feeling the smarting tears start to my eyes.

It was thus that I lost my youngest son, my loving and well-loved Malcolm. He died a soldier's death in that fatal valley.

Just a few days of intolerable suspense, and then the absolute certainty.

I will pass over the details. They are painful even now to recall.

For one brief space a wave of wild rebellion against God's will surged over me.

It seemed as if He had laid upon me more than I could bear. I think it was for about two days that the black waters of doubt and darkness closed me in—a black spot in my memory, which I cannot often bear to look back upon.

And then, like a voice from heaven itself, came the blessed words of assurance:

"My grace shall be sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness. Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee."

I looked up to heaven, and saw light behind the cloud. The rainbow was shining in my stormy sky, and I could say—falteringly at first, but afterwards with calmness and even with joy—"Thy will be done. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

The winter wore away, and the glad springtide came again; but I began to observe a change in my Elizabeth, that gave me some uneasiness.

Her brother's death had been a shock to her, and I was not surprised that she drooped a while, and grew pale, dreamy, and quiet.

For a month or two this change gave me no disquiet, for I saw that she felt Malcolm's death increasingly as days went by, and I did not wonder at it.

But as months passed, and my darling's birthday came and went, and the time appointed for George's return and her own wedding approached by rapid strides, then I did begin to wonder at her continued look of care and sorrow, and began to feel uneasy at the change I saw in her.

She did not give me her full confidence in this point. I was aware that something was troubling her, of which I was ignorant. She talked to me of Malcolm's death, and her grief on his account; yet I was fully aware all the time that another and a greater trouble lay behind.

At last all came out.

We were out in the garden together one sweet spring day—almost summer-like in its warmth and fragrance, and I asked about George's return, and when he was coming to claim his bride.

I did not understand the look that crossed my child's face.

"I do not think he is coming over at all this year."

looked at her in great surprise.

"My darling, you were to have been married this summer."

Still she looked away with sad eyes, and a pale, wistful face.

"I do not think we shall be married now, mother," she said quietly.

"Do you wish to wait till your year of mourning for Malcolm is over?"

Her lips quivered, and by-and-by she said:

"It is not that exactly. Sometimes I think I shall never be married at all."

I looked up again, more surprised still. Suddenly her enforced calm gave way, and she knelt beside me sobbing, burying her face in my lap.

I let her cry for a time, without attempting to check her, and then I asked gently:

"Has George changed towards you in his absence, my darling?"

She shook her head vehemently.

"Oh, no, no, no!—not that!"

"What then?" I asked; but for some minutes I only got convulsive sobs for answer.

"Tell me, darling, what troubles you. Let me share it with you. All troubles are lighter for being divided. Let me take a part. My little Elizabeth has never, I think, kept a secret from her mother before. Why begin now?"

She lifted her head at last, and looked at me with a world of love in her eyes.

"Mother," she said, in broken, faltering tones, "I do not think I shall ever marry. Now that Malcolm is dead, I do not see how I can leave you.

I have almost decided to stay at home always. I cannot bear to think of your being alone."

I held her in my arms and kissed her tenderly. It was very sweet to hear such words; but they did not tempt me to accept this great sacrifice at my child's willing hands.

"Is this what has been troubling you all these long weeks, my darling?"

She looked up wistfully.

"I have been thinking about it ever since—ever since November; and it seemed to grow plainer and plainer. Mother, I cannot leave you!"

She clung to me passionately, and again the deep-drawn sobs broke from her.

"My darling," I said, "do you think it makes me happy for you to break your heart?"

She could not answer articulately, but murmured something about always being happy with me.

"But George?" I said.

Then came more tears, and amid the quick sobs I caught the strangled words:

"Yes, it is just that—George—I love you—I love you so that nothing—is—too hard. But he is alone—he has nobody—and he does so love me. It breaks my heart—to hurt him—so."

The scene was growing painful. I hastened to put a stop to this agitation.

"Elizabeth," I said, "try to calm yourself

and listen to me. I have my word to keep, and my duty to do by you, as you have done yours by me all the years we have lived together. When George came and asked me for you, I gave him my word without any condition, that if he would wait till a given time he should take you away as his wife. He has waited patiently and loyally; he has given to you all the chivalrous love of a manly heart; he has given me the obedience and love of a son. His share of the contract has been nobly carried out. He has shown himself worthy of the wife he seeks to win. What return can we make him for his devotion and patience? Am I to turn round and deny the promise I have made him?"

My quiet tone calmed and stilled Elizabeth; she looked up and said:

"It is not you, mother, but I."

"If you do it for my sake, and I permit it, it is as much my doing as yours."

"How can I leave you? How can I go away when you are all alone?"

"My child, I am not alone. One Friend is always with me. You must not think that I shall brood in loneliness and sorrow, if my children leave the nest to go out into the lives appointed them by God. He will give me work to do, and grace to help me in the doing. He will never leave me nor forsake me; and I can pray for his blessing,

and look for His help far more confidently if I do my duty towards my dear ones than if I selfishly stand in the way of the happiness of those who love and trust me, and spoil two lives that, but for me, might have been full of life's deepest joy. I gave you up, my darling, two years ago, and I have never wished the words unsaid. I will not cloud your life to brighten mine—nor would it really cheer me to keep you with me selfishly. You must go to your husband when he comes to claim you; and I shall write and bid him keep the appointed time.

My darling's face was suffused with lovely blushes. She buried her face in my bosom, and wept away the last of her trouble in my arms.

Poor darling! the struggle had almost been too much for her tender heart—two conflicting loves fighting for mastery. She had been torn in twain by the battle that had silently raged within her; thinking little of herself or her own hopes and happiness, but of the feelings of others and the duties she owed to mother and promised husband.

Why could she not have spoken earlier?

I would so gladly have spared her all the pangs she had suffered. Yet, perhaps, it was well that she had learned a little of the battle with sorrow and pain, without which no nature can be perfected. My Elizabeth came out of that conflict

ennobled by all she had suffered; her nature deepened, her whole character purified and strengthened.

I summoned George, who had likewise suffered from the tone of the letters Elizabeth had written, and before that summer ended a quiet wedding took place at Lydgate, and the last of my children went out from the old home.

I was not allowed to feel it painfully at the time. Arthur brought his young wife to this wedding, and they remained with me for several weeks, and did all in their power to show their love and care for me.

I was tranquil and content, and I shed no tears when my sweet Elizabeth parted from me, to go to her home in a foreign land. I commended her to the care of the Heavenly Father, and let her go, smiling upon her, as I had smiled upon Malcolm, when he went forth to fight and to die.

But I could not forget that both my twin children had left me—and in a sense forever in this world—the children of my old age, whom once I had fondly hoped to keep always with me.

Lydgate was a strange place without their bright faces and sweet voices. I seemed to live in the days of the past, and to fancy they were still tiny children, playing in their nursery, and running with uneven steps along the corridors and through the large empty rooms.

I lived for a few weeks much in the past, and only woke up to find myself alone in my large house, where, in all probability, I should always be alone now.

So I asked God for help and strength and guidance, and the support of His Good Spirit in all that I did; and I took up the life that remained to me, and tried to live it to His glory, by thinking of those around me who needed help and comfort, and by caring for those who seemed uncared for by all the world.

God spoke to me then, as He has spoken to many another lonely woman in my place:

"Insomuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

CHAPTER XXV.

LAST LINKS.

AND now there is little more to tell of the story of my life, although a quarter of a century has passed since I lost my twin children from the old home.

These years have been very tranquil and peaceful. I have been greatly blessed both in body and soul, and, after the battles of a somewhat stormy life, I have been vouchsafed a wonderfully peaceful eventide.

I have lived to see my children's children grow up around me, and those I love best have ever been to me beyond what mother's heart could wish. No one could have been more dutifully watched and tended than I have been; and if my life has been outwardly sorrowful and lonely, I can only say that by God's mercy I have never felt it so within.

Just a few threads I must gather up before I close my tale.

The year following Elizabeth's wedding brought me a visitor—General Lyon.

He had served all through the war, and had only lately returned to England, covered with military honors for the gallantry of his conduct.

He sought me out the first moment he could call his own. I welcomed him gladly, for he was a friend whom I deeply valued and respected.

I had many questions to ask, but they died away upon my lips. My wound was too recent then to bear much handling.

After we had talked for some time upon the questions of the day, and his own share in the campaign, he himself introduced the topic nearest both of our hearts.

"Mrs. Baskerville," he said, fumbling in his pocket, "I bring you something of your son's."

He held out a small packet wrapped in paper. I tore away the wrappings, and found the little Bible I had placed in Malcolm's kit before he left me.

But it was not fresh and new, as it had left my hands, but stained and battered almost beyond recognition. A bullet was deeply imbedded in it, and the stain upon its cover was the stain of blood.

I could not speak as I looked at it, holding it in my trembling hands, whilst the tears slowly dropped upon it.

General Lyon himself spoke somewhat huskily as he proceeded with his tale:

"We found it upon him as he lay in the valley, wounded and dying. He said you would like it; and I have kept it to give you with my own hands."

I started and looked up. I had never known that my boy had not been killed upon the spot, under that deadly fire. I did not know that he had lived to speak a last word before his brave young spirit fled.

"Tell me," I whispered, "tell me all. I know nothing—except his death."

"I would not confide the message to paper. Our posts were not to be trusted. I wrote it in the little book, and charged my friends that, whatever befell me, the packet was to be sent to you."

He paused; but I could make no answer, only repeat my former words:

"Tell me—tell me all."

"There is little to tell. We found him dying where he had fallen, his horse lying dead beside him. He was in no pain—the shot and shell had done its work too well for that; he just breathed, and that was all. We knew he was dying, and so did he. He smiled and made a sign for me to bend my ear down to his lips.

"'Take my little Bible,' he whispered, 'and give it to my mother. Tell her I read it every day, and often read it to my men, and told them, as well as I could, some of the things she told me. Many poor fellows she will never see have blessed her

name. Give my love to Elizabeth— and all,—and above all to my mother. Tell her I have tried to keep my armor bright—tell her that the valley of death is not dark."

"That was all he could say, and that was spoken with many pauses and with difficult utterance. He just closed his eyes and breathed one sigh, and his spirit passed away into the keeping of the God who gave it."

My tears fell fast, but they were tears of healing, and of glad gratitude. My boy had kept his promise, and had followed my other dear ones into the better land. He was not lost, but gone before; and I could say once more, "It is well."

General Lyon told me many simple, touching anecdotes of my boy's latter days, and left me greatly cheered and comforted. He ranked from that day as one of my best and most honored friends, and we met frequently and with mutual satisfaction, until his death, which occurred in 1864.

. . . . . .

What other threads remain to be gathered up before my story closes?

What of Lelia?

I only saw her once again, for she lived for the most part abroad. But on one occasion, when on a visit to Tom in London, I met her at a reception, to which my children had insisted on taking me.

She was still very handsome and brilliant, but I

could see that time had made ravages in that once so perfect beauty, and that Art had now to make amends for Nature's fading charms. It was evident to my eye that the life of pleasure-seeking which she had led had wearied without satisfying the craving of the soul within.

She sought me out, and said, with more feeling than I should have expected :

"Ah, dear Aunt Kate, how glad I am to see you again ! You were with *her*—my mother—when she died. I have never forgiven myself for my conduct,"—and a very remorseful look crossed the beautiful face. "I believe I might have prevailed and gone to her, had my heart been bent on it ; but it was not. I was happy and gay in my new life, and I did not wish to leave it. I would not believe in the danger. I blinded my eyes to facts, and only too late did I awake to realize what I had done. I let my mother die alone—she would have been alone but for you—whilst I was dancing my time away in reckless enjoyment and vainglory. I hope God may forgive me, but I never can forgive myself."

And then she turned and left me, as if afraid to say more. I never saw my young kinswoman again ; and I am glad that my last impression of her was one which revealed a greater depth of feeling than I should have looked to find.

Henry Scrope I saw but twice—both times in

London. He was little better than a broken-down *roué*—reaping as he had sown; and when he died, sixteen years after his wife, I think he left behind not one sincere mourner. His was a melancholy career of selfishness and self-indulgence; let us not judge him.

. . . . . .

Peaceful and happy have been the declining years of my life. My children have been more to me than I can say.

Harold has never married, and his home is still with me, but his active life leaves me little of his company. He has risen high in the service, and loves his profession with an enthusiasm that never cools, although he is getting to be, as he says, 'quite an old man;' and in truth he is advancing into years, though I can never realize it.

Tom and Arthur have been peculiarly happy in their wedded life, and sufficiently successful in the careers they have respectively chosen to fill me with a certain pride and pleasure. Their wives are like daughters to me, and their children especially dear.

Elizabeth's life has been a brilliant as well as a happy one. Her husband is now our ambassador at the Court of——.

But no outward grandeur ever changes my sweet daughter. She is ever the same to me—simple,

loving, tender, full of devotion and filial gratitude, the dearest and the best of children.

I think the happiest hours of my happy old age have been those spent by Elizabeth and her husband at Lydgate, with their two sweet children, Lovel and Ursula.

And now, I think, I have no more to tell.

The story of my long life has been narrated; and as I look back upon the past, I see, more clearly than all beside, the Hand of God guiding all.

Heavenly Father, unto Thee I commit all that remains to me of this mortal life. Do with me as Thou wilt; and in Thine own good time call me, I pray Thee, to join my loved ones on the farther shore, whither they have gone before!

Very near to the dark valley must my steps be tending now, yet I know that the darkness will be no darkness to me.

As Thou hast led me through the desert of life, so wilt Thou lead me through the river of death.

"Behold, I come quickly. Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus."

CONCLUSION.

THAT is my grandmother's story, reproduced as nearly as possible from the quiet recital that was my greatest pleasure during the days of my convalescence.

But no pen can do full justice to the power and the pathos of the story as she told it—with the intense reality that only personal experience can give. As I look back at the pages I have written, I feel how colorless are the words which seemed to fall with such glowing emphasis from her lips.

She was so beautiful, my grandmother, who was nearly eighty years of age when she told me her story; so grand, and yet so sweet and so gentle. As I looked at her, it often seemed as if heaven's light shown upon her face, and there was a something about her which I can only speak of as "nearness to God."

The strange charm and power of this nameless attribute I can never forget and never describe.

I esteem it one of my highest privileges to have been thus admitted to my grandmother's confidence, and to have learned to know and to love her before she was taken away from us.

So deeply did I reverence her, so intensely did she captivate my fancy and elevate my spiritual being, that I begged to be allowed to prolong my visit indefinitely; and when at last I returned home to the Mount, it was not long before I was petitioning to go back to Lydgate.

How glad I am that this second visit was so readily accorded to me! How deeply thankful I often feel that I was permitted to be with my honored grandmother, when at last the call came from above, and she was bidden to enter the valley of the shadow of death.

Dark, do men call that passage.

I never saw such calm brilliance of heavenly light as shone upon that mysterious way as our loved one set out upon it, to join those who had gone before.

I had gone back with my grandmother after she had spent Christmas with us at the Mount. She seldom left home in the winter. Generally my Uncle Arthur or my Aunt Elizabeth, with their respective families, had passed the festive season with her; but this year both were unable to do this, and, by our special wish, she had come to the Mount.

I went back with her to Lydgate, and we spent some happy weeks together there. I think my youthful adoration pleased and touched her. She was goodness itself to me, and my chiefest joy was hearing her sometimes say:

"My child, you make me think of your Aunt Elizabeth."

She seemed well and bright, although somewhat feeble, during the cold weather. She talked about "getting old" sometimes, with one of the sweet smiles that I loved to see. How many lessons I learnt from her as we sat together in the long winter evenings! I pray God each day of my life, to keep the memory of her words green in my heart, and to make me more like her!

And then came the peaceful closing scene, which never will be effaced from my memory even if I live to her great age.

It was not exactly an illness, but a sudden breaking up—a collapse of the wonderful strength that had stood the wear and tear of sorrow and grief for eighty long years. Suddenly and without warning that power left her, and we all knew that she would not be with us long.

What a gathering there was round that sick bed! Can I ever forget it?

My father and mother came first, quickly followed by Uncle Harold and Uncle Arthur. His wife could not come, for my little new cousin was

but two weeks old; but she was the only one missing of the sons and daughters still living. Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle George travelled night and day, and arrived before we thought it possible. I think Aunt Elizabeth's heart would almost have broken had she been too late.

I was on the spot, or I should hardly have been present at this solemn reunion of a scattered family. But I had been so much with grandmother of late that she seemed to miss my presence from her side, and so I was constantly with her, storing up precious memories for days to come.

Great weakness robbed her, to a certain extent, of those remarkable powers of mind for which she had been justly celebrated. She seemed hardly to know or notice the change of faces about her, and although she knew each of the loved ones as they approached, she did not appear to have realized what this gathering together must mean, or to be aware that all were together in the house.

Never was a more bright and happy death-bed. She lay in quiet, restful peacefulness of spirit. Every little service was rewarded by a smile, and every one who approached was greeted by a sweet look of recognition and love.

Not a murmur, not a sound of aught but love and gratitude, was ever heard at that bedside. We could not feel that any sad change was approaching in the light of that radiant face. Our own

grief was swallowed up in the thought of the brightness waiting for her.

Day by day her feeble strength waned. The lamp of life burned ever more low. A breath, as it seemed, might extinguish it; the end drew very near.

She died in the night—at midnight, I think it was—and we were all with her, for the doctor had told us at sunset that she was sinking fast.

She had hardly spoken all through the day, had hardly appeared to notice those about her, and we half expected to see her pass away without awaking from this lethargy.

But it was not so.

As the hour of midnight tolled from the great tower clock, she stirred in her sleep and opened her eyes.

Slowly her glance travelled round that circle of faces around the bed, and she smiled with that peculiar radiance I had seen so often in her eyes—heaven's own light, I think it must have been.

"All of them!" she whispered, holding out one feeble hand. "All my dear ones watching on this side—and my dear lost ones waiting on the other. O Lord my God, I thank Thee for Thine unspeakable goodness!"

She looked at each in turn. They bent to kiss her, and to each she murmured some words of blessing and comfort.

I can only repeat my own:

"My child, the dark valley is not dark to those who love the Lord. Love Him with all your heart —give your young life into His keeping. He will never leave you nor forsake you; and then, when your turn comes, He will carry you safely over the dark river, as He is carrying me now."

It was the last flicker of life. We heard no more actual words; but the calm beauty of that dying face can never be forgotten.

We watched the light slowly fade, and we had almost said—

"She is gone!"

When suddenly a new light beamed for one moment in those dying eyes, and if ever *recognition* was expressed in looks, it was in that last glance. I knew as well as if she had told us, that she had seen upon the eternal shore those who were "not lost, but gone before."

And so my grandmother died; and we buried her beside her husband and children in the quiet churchyard, not far from the home in which she had lived so long.

We had no need to seek for further words to place upon the stone which marked her last resting place.

The words already there gave the clue to her life's history—

"*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the*

shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

And again—

"*The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*"

THE END.

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